

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY



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No. 443.

Price, Five Cents.

THE MYSTERY OF THE FRONT ROOM

OR NICK CARTER'S MARVELOUS WORK

by THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



The attack was so sudden, and so really unexpected, that Ordway's fingers were around the detective's throat, almost before Nick Carter realized that he was attacked.



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NEW YORK, June 24, 1905.

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THE MYSTERY OF THE FRONT ROOM;

OR,

Nick Carter's Marvelous Work.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW BUTCHER KNIFE.

A hot morning during the first week of September.

A policeman, half asleep, was leaning against a fire-alarm box awaiting the coming of his relief, and twice he awoke sufficiently from his drowsiness to produce his watch and note how lazily the time passed, each time thereafter resuming his former attitude.

Once he recovered himself to the extent of stepping out into the middle of the avenue—it was Madison Avenue, by the way—and the intersecting street, where he remained two or three minutes, staring first in one direction and then another until he had covered the four points of the compass, after which he returned to the post again.

After a little, however, he was roused from his lethargy by the appearance of his relief, who was walking deliberately toward him from the direction of Broadway.

"'Mornin', Pat," said the newcomer, laconically.

"'Mornin', Jim," was the stereotyped reply; and the two

shook hands as solemnly as if they had encountered each other over the corpse of a mutual friend and had come to celebrate his wake.

"This is going to be a corker," remarked the one called Jim, after a pause, and referring to the heat of the morning.

"It's that already, I'm thinking," replied Pat. "This is the time of year when——"

His remark came to an abrupt termination, for it was interrupted by a scream which rang up and down the avenue on the still morning air, with startling clearness.

Both of the policemen wheeled in their tracks, for they had been standing with their backs toward the direction whence the scream proceeded, and, as they did so, they each saw a housemaid dash wildly down the steps of a residence in the middle of the block.

She was wringing her hands together, and uttering scream after scream, and it was evident that she had either suddenly gone mad, or that she had been frightened almost out of her senses.

Both officers started in her direction on the run, and each reached her at the same time.

"What's the matter, girl?" demanded Pat Conlin, the officer who had just been relieved from duty.

"Murder!" cried the housemaid. "My beautiful young mistress! Oh, my God!"

"Come, then, and show us where it is," said the officer, seizing her by one arm while Jim Devlin, the policeman who had relieved him, took hold of the other one.

For a moment she resisted and cried out that she would not return to the house for all that it contained, but they dragged her along with them in spite of her struggles, for already windows along the block were going up, and curious persons were thrusting forth their heads to discover what the screaming was about.

They saw little or nothing, however, as it happened, for the two officers had passed through the door with the girl between them before anyone had discovered the real import of the affair.

"Now," said Pat Conlin, when they were inside, "where is it?"

"In her room! In her room, I tell you. The front room on the next floor. Oh, sir, for the love of Heaven don't take me into that room again."

Notwithstanding her pleadings, however, the two officers took her with them up the stairs and passed through the hallway to the door of the room she had indicated, which was wide open.

Conlin, who was the senior of the two officers and therefore virtually in command of the situation, released his grasp upon the girl's arm, and said to his companion:

"You stay here with her, Jim, while I go inside."

He stepped across the threshold and entered the room.

It was quite dark inside, and the first thing he did was to hasten to the windows and throw up the shades; and then, as a flood of light dispelled the darkness of the room, he turned toward the bed, which stood in the recess of an alcove and in three strides was beside it.

Then he started back in dismay and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

The spectacle before him was not at all what he had expected to see, but it was none the less appalling for all that.

There was no dead body upon the bed; it was, in fact, tenantless; but it had a story to tell, nevertheless.

It was torn and disheveled beyond description; the covers were scattered about everywhere, partly on the bed, partly on the floor. One pillow was wedged through the brass frame of the head of the bed, the bolster was half withdrawn from it, toward the windows, the mattress was half pulled from its place, and the entire appearance of the scene indicated that a mighty and a desperate struggle had taken place there.

But that was not all.

The sheets, the pillows, the bolster, the mattress—every-

thing, in fact, connected with the bed, was covered with blood.

There was blood everywhere.

A clotted pool of it was in the very middle of the mattress. The sheets were spotted and stained with it, in smears and blotches. One of the pillows—the one that was wedged into the brasswork, was saturated with it.

There was blood on the walls at the head and at one side of the bed, and as Pat Conlin raised his eyes to the ceiling, he could see that some of it had even reached to that distance.

"There must have been a fight for fair in this place," was his muttered thought.

Then he turned from the bed and surveyed the room.

A small library table near the center of the room, which had supported a drop light, was moved so far out of place that the strain upon the rubber hose, which was pendent from the chandelier above, had overturned the drop light and shattered the green shade with which it had been provided.

A chair near the table had been overturned, and one of the legs was broken squarely off, and when Conlin bent forward to examine it more closely, he discovered that there were also blood stains upon that chair leg.

Conlin had been long enough in the business to know that he should not disturb anything, and he was careful not to do so; but he had always had a taste for detective work, and so he observed as closely as possible all that he was able to discover.

For instance, there was a spat of blood upon a pad of paper which was lying on the desk, as if the murderer—or the victim—had touched the spot with a bloody hand; there was a smear of the same stain against the casing of the door, where it opened into the hall, and there was a policeman's short stick, or "billy," literally covered with it, lying on the floor between the bed and the table.

"What the blazes is it, anyhow, Pat?" called out the impatient officer in the hall, at this moment. "The girl has fainted, so there's no reason why I shouldn't come in there with you, is there?"

"No. Come in if you want to."

Thus invited, Devlin fixed the housemaid as comfortably as he could on the stairs which led to the next floor and joined his compatriot inside the gory and terrible room.

"Don't touch anything," ordered Conlin. "See everything, and remember everything you see, but don't touch or move a thing."

"I won't. Heavens, Pat, but there must have been a scrap here."

"I should say so. I never saw a place so bespattered with blood in all my life."

"Where's the corpse?" asked Devlin, gazing at the bed in wide-eyed amazement.

Conlin had out his notebook and was rapidly writing

down the facts as he found them in order to make a detailed report to his captain, and he did not at once reply.

"Where's the corpse?" asked Devlin, again.

"It ain't here," said Pat.

"Faith, anybody could see that with half an eye; but where is it?"

"I know just as much about that as you do, Jim; no more, and no less."

"Maybe it's somewhere else in the house—in one of the other rooms."

"Maybe it is. I hadn't thought of that."

"We'd better look for it."

"We will in a minute. Keep still, won't you, till I get through with what I'm doin'."

"What are you doing, Pat?"

"Getting me report ready for the captain, sure."

Devlin strode around the room, peering here and there, and taking care not to disturb anything, while he permitted his colleague to finish his notes; but presently he said:

"Did you see this, Pat?"

"What is it?" asked Pat, without raising his eyes.

"A knife, sure, no less. A brand-new butcher knife, bought for this very business, maybe."

Conlin ceased with his notes and crossed to where Devlin was standing.

Sure enough, there was a knife such as he had already described, and it was smeared from end to end, handle, blade and all, with the same red stains which were so prevalent in the room.

The position of the knife was interesting, too. It was lying upon the dresser—a low, wide bureau, if you will—behind the pin cushion, and the first glance at it suggested to Conlin that it had been hurled or thrown there during the fight. The dresser was fully twenty feet from the bed.

In falling where it was found, the knife had evidently struck the pin cushion, and then slid down to its present position, where it was almost hidden, for there was a stain on the cushion cover, where the knife had doubtless touched it.

This discovery required an added note or two in the book, which Conlin then closed with a snap and returned to his pocket.

"We'll take a long look through the house now, Jim, and see if we can find the corpse," he said, "and after that you can go out to the patrol box and notify the captain while I stay here on guard."

He turned toward the door and stepped into the hall. Then he halted.

"Jim," he exclaimed, "the girl has gone. She was fooling you, and she's given us the slip. She's gone, I tell you—gone!"

CHAPTER II

READING THE WALLS.

When Conlin made the announcement that the girl had fled, Devlin leaped past him and was down the stairs and out at the front door—which stood wide open now—as quickly as it was possible for him to move.

But the housemaid had been given ample time to make good her escape.

Whether the faint into which Devlin supposed she had fallen was a sham or not, it was evident that she had discovered that she was alone soon after the officer left her, and that she had lost no time in getting clear of the house.

Certain it was that she was nowhere to be seen when Devlin dashed into the street, and gazed first one way and then the other in the hope of discovering her.

And a vexing circumstance about the affair was that neither was there a pedestrian in sight along the thoroughfare who was near enough to have noticed her when she must have appeared.

"She's gone, all right," muttered Devlin, pausing at the bottom of the steps and scratching his head in perplexity. "There's no use in running to either corner in search of her, for I don't know which one to go to, and whichever one I selected, she is sure to have gone to the other one; that's always my luck."

He replaced the helmet on his head and returned to the house.

"She's gone, Pat," he said, when he found Conlin awaiting him at the top of the stairs.

"Well, why the blazes don't you chase after her, then?"

"I will, sure, if you'll tell me where to chase. Sure, she's gone, I tell you. There ain't a hide nor a hair of her to be seen, and there ain't a livin' soul on the street who could have seen her go out, either."

"We'll be broke for it—or you will," said Conlin, sorrowfully.

"'Twas with your permission that I left her in the hall and went into the room," said Devlin.

"That's so, Jim. We'll take the blame together, so we will."

"That's good of you, Pat," remarked Devlin, slowly, "but I'm thinkin' that it was me own fault, after all."

"Tut, tut, man! But never you mind about it now. It's done and it can't be helped, just at this minute. Get along to the patrol box wid you now, and notify the sergeant. It may be that the captain is there. Anyhow, while you're gone I'll take a look at the other rooms in the house."

"Maybe you'll find the corpse."

"Maybe I will."

Conlin remained where he was standing until the door had closed behind his colleague, and then he began a systematic search of the house, going from room to room

carefully, thoughtfully, and with every sense he possessed thought both to be broke for permitting that girl to get on the alert.

But, as it happened, everywhere he searched he found things in perfect order.

Save for that one room where so much had happened the house showed no sign whatever of an unwelcome visitor—with just one single exception.

That exception was the bathroom.

One glance inside it assured the officer that the murderer had made use of it to cleanse himself—or herself, as the case might be—of the forbidding stains which must have covered him from head to foot.

The bathtub was empty, but nevertheless it bore ample evidence that it had lately been filled with water that was stained to a bright red, for along the sides of it could be seen the line to which the water had risen, and near the waste pipe there still lingered stains which told only too plainly what had caused them.

The washbowl afforded the same mute evidence as the bathtub, and there were several unmistakable spots of blood on the tiled floor.

Conlin closed the door and locked it. Then he continued his search.

"That woman who was killed—the housemaid said it was a woman—and the maid must have lived there alone together," mused Conlin; "or at least they were alone in the house when this thing happened. Sorry's the day when I let that girl give us the slip!"

He found the room evidently occupied by the maid, but, as in other places, he disturbed not a thing. But the room demonstrated that it had been occupied during the night; it was evident that the maid had made use of the bed for a part of the night at least.

But that was all he was able to determine.

Nowhere else in the house save in the front room on the second floor, and in the bathroom, was there the slightest evidence that the residence had been visited by an intruder, or that anything untoward had occurred within in.

And then, having completed what investigations he dared make on his own responsibility, he descended to the front steps and seated himself upon the stone balustrade to await the arrival of his superior officer.

The captain arrived soon thereafter, and he stood on the front steps with Conlin, while he listened intently to the report the officer had to make; then, instructing him to remain on duty at the door and to permit no one to enter the house without his permission, he passed inside accompanied by the sergeant.

But he did not remain long.

The report made by Conlin was so complete that it required merely a casual survey of the interior of the house by the captain to substantiate every essential point.

"Conlin," he said, when he came out, "you and Devlin

go away."

"I know it, sir. It is inexcusable."

"Well, we'll say no more about it for the present. Do you know where Nick Carter lives?"

"I do, sir."

"This is a case for him, if ever there was one."

"I think so, too, sir."

"I have sent word to the central office, and I expect the inspector will soon be here, or it may be that he will only send a couple of his men."

"Yes, sir."

"You are off duty, aren't you as soon as you have reported at the station house?"

"I am, sir."

"You may telephone in your report from the patrol box; say that I said so. Then, as soon as you have done that, get down to Nick Carter's house as quickly as possible, and tell him that I will esteem it a favor if he will come to me here as soon as he can make it convenient. And, say, Conlin!"

"Yes, sir."

"You might suggest that I wouldn't be at all sorry if he should happen to arrive before those dubs at the central office arrive. Understand?"

"Sure, sir. Maybe I needn't stop to telephone in my report to the station house, at all, seein' that I've already made it to you. It would save time."

"All right. Skip."

"I might even gain a little more time by telephoning to Mr. Carter."

"No; I want you to go after him. He will wish to ask you some questions, and he can do that on the way back. Now, light out of here!"

"Yes, sir."

It was not far from the scene of the incidents related to the home of the great detective, and it was surprising how quickly Conlin covered the distance; as for Devlin, he had, of course, taken up his regular duties on his beat.

The time was still early in the morning, and yet Conlin found the detective had just finished his breakfast when he arrived.

In as few words as possible he delivered his captain's message.

"If you please, Mr. Carter," he said, "the captain's at number — Madison Avenue, and he would consider it a great favor if you would go to him there as soon as possible, so as to get there before some others he has sent for can do it, and ask me what questions you want to know about it while we are getting there."

The detective smiled broadly at this quaint but emphatic manner of emphasizing the captain's wishes; but he immediately seized his hat.

"Come along, Conlin," he said. "We will talk as we go."

"Yes, sir."

"We will have to walk, anyway. We can make it more quickly that way."

"Sure, sir."

"Now, what is it all about?"

"Murder, sir."

"Well, tell me about it. Begin at the beginning and tell me all you know."

Thus abjured, the policeman gave the detective a graphic and truthful account of the incidents of the morning, from the moment when he was leaning half asleep against the fire-alarm box to the end of the chapter, so far as he knew it; and to do him justice he made his statement clearly and concisely.

"It is too bad you permitted that girl to get away, Conlin," said the detective, when the recital was concluded, "although I don't think she knows a thing about the crime itself."

"Then, what did she run away for, sir?"

"Principally, I suppose, because she was frightened out of her wits, and doubtless half crazed by grief as well. She will return of her own accord, or show up at the station house or somewhere as soon as she recovers her self-possession."

"Do you really think so, sir?"

"I am sure of it."

"I thought maybe, when I saw that bath room——"

"Well?"

"That, maybe, she might have done the thing herself and washed up after it."

"Hardly. Did you not say that you went through the house thoroughly?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you find any blood-stained clothing or anything of the kind?"

"Not a scrap."

"She wasn't blood-stained herself when you saw her, was she?"

"She was as neat as wax."

"I don't think I would connect her with the crime if I were you, Conlin. How are you, captain?" the detective added, as he ran up the steps to where that official was awaiting him.

"Good-morning, Nick. It was good of you to get here in a hurry. Come right in."

"Has anything been disturbed at all?" asked Nick, as they ascended the stairs to the second floor.

"Not a thing. Conlin swears he has not touched a thing, and I'm sure I haven't. You see, Nick, I wanted you to get a look at things before——"

"Yes, captain, I understand; and I'm obliged to you, too."

The captain followed the detective into the room, but halted near the door in order not to interfere with Nick

Carter's work, as well as the better to watch him while he was engaged in it.

There were three windows fronting upon the street; and while the windows were themselves closed, the inside blinds were open and the shades had been rolled clear to the top of the casing, so that the room was flooded with light.

The detective's first act was to step to the center of the room, near the library table, which has been referred to before, and to halt there while he searched with his eyes alone, every nook, corner, place and spot within his range of vision.

This is a favorite method with him and one which he never fails to employ when there is opportunity and light sufficient for the purpose.

He did it tip quarters, if the expression may be used; that is, he faced four different ways, one after another, in making a study of this kind.

Just now, when he entered the room, after one rapid glance at the bed, the captain was surprised to see him turn his back to the windows and begin his eye search at what would have been the last point with any other man.

Five minutes he remained motionless in that position, save that now and then he turned his head a very little, and that his eyes were constantly roving from place to place.

Then, suddenly, he changed his attitude and stood so that he faced the mantel and the unused grate beneath it.

In this position he consumed a somewhat longer time—perhaps seven or eight minutes—and then, as suddenly as he had done so before, he wheeled squarely around and faced in directly the opposite position.

Now, it will be understood, he was facing the bed itself, and for the next fifteen minutes it seemed to the captain as if Nick Carter had turned to stone, so rigidly did he maintain his attitude; but at the end of that time he changed his position again, this time so that he faced the windows.

Again he became absorbed, and for ten minutes did not move; but at the end of that time he turned to the captain and smiled grimly.

"There is quite a long story here, captain," he said; "but I have not finished yet. I wonder how much more time we'll have before we are interrupted."

"Oh! you'll have another half hour, safe enough."

"That will be ample."

"Do you think I ought to notify the coroner, Nick?"

"Why?" asked the detective.

"Don't you think I ought to send for him?"

"What for?"

"Why, to take cognizance of all this affair."

"What has the coroner got to do with it?"

"Eh?"

"There isn't any dead body here, captain. We do not even know that a crime has been committed, do we?"

"It looks mightily like it."

"To be sure, it does; but we do not know that it is so, do we?"

"N-n-no; I can't say that we do."

"Then don't let us get too many fingers in this pie."

There was silence for several moments, during which Nick drew close to the bed and studied the evidences of crime around and upon it with close interest.

Then he turned toward the captain, and said:

"Yes, there's an interesting story here—a mighty interesting one. Come here a moment, captain; I want to show you something."

CHAPTER III

A STORY WRITTEN IN BLOOD.

The captain obeyed with alacrity, for he had become decidedly impatient during this somewhat extended and silent study in which the detective had indulged.

Nick was standing between the bed and the window, and when the captain drew near he indicated silently an unusually large blotch of half-dried blood on the carpet near the head of the bed.

"There is something which Conlin overlooked," he said. "I am glad that he did not step on it and so obliterate it. Do you see anything there, captain?"

"Sure; a footprint."

"Exactly."

"Made by a woman's shoe."

"Or slipper, eh?"

"Well, either. It's the same thing."

"Not quite."

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you see where she slipped just a little when she stepped upon that blotch of blood, captain?"

"Yes, I do; that's so."

"Now, doesn't it occur to you that the act of slipping told her what she had done, and that if it were possible she would either cleanse the sole of the slipper—for I think it was a slipper and not a shoe—or she would change the slippers she had on for a different pair?"

"I don't think the idea would have occurred to me; no."

"There is a large closet over there at the other side of the room, captain. Would you mind taking a look inside and telling me if there is a shoe bag there?"

"Not at all."

"And if there is, just see if there is not also a pair of slippers among the contents, one of which made this print here. I am quite sure that you will find it somewhere, there."

The captain turned away, and Nick continued his investigation.

He was absorbed by another discovery he made when he heard the captain exclaim:

"What is it, captain?" he asked, calmly.

"The slipper. I've found it."

"I thought you would. Is its mate there with it?"

"Yes."

"All right. Would you mind putting them both back where you found them, and leaving them there until the gentlemen from the central office have completed their investigations?"

"Oh, I want to leave everything here for them."

"Quite right, captain. Will you come here again now?"

"Sure. What is it this time, Nick?"

"Something rather odd this time. Something rather unusual. Look."

Nick was pointing at the largest blood spot of all—the one in the very middle of the bed.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," he said, "there is the very plain imprint of a butcher knife, handle and all; the one, I suppose, which Conlin says is on the bureau over there. Do you see it?"

"Plainly."

"Do you notice anything remarkable about it?"

"Can't say that I do, more than that it is rather strange that it should be there at all."

"Oh, I don't know; I think it is quite in keeping with the rest of the story I read here. It strikes me as being all a piece off the same cloth."

"What do you see that is remarkable about the print of that knife, Nick?"

"Why, that there are two prints of it instead of one. One of them is very faint, to be sure, but it is there none the less. Look closely and you will see it."

"Yes, I do. I see it now."

"What does it suggest to you, captain?"

"Not a thing in life, Nick—unless, when the knife was dropped in the blood, it rolled over."

"May it not have been turned over?"

"Eh?"

"Isn't it possible that it was placed there, in the first place, instead of being dropped by accident, and that after it was placed there, it was turned over deliberately?"

"What the devil are you driving at, Nick?"

"That will develop later on. Here is something, captain, which may be of interest, and which I wish you would put in your pocket, and keep there until I ask for it. It will not help the others much, I imagine, and we may find it useful later on."

The article he mentioned, and which he now placed in the captain's outstretched hand, was a woman's ring—a slender band of gold surmounted by two hearts interlocked and in the center of each heart a small but perfect ruby.

"Where did you find it?" asked the captain.

"In the bed—under the edge of the pillow that is wedged in between the brasswork."

"What does it signify, Nick? You read a significance in everything you see."

"I am not prepared to say just at present. Now, captain, before we leave this part of the room I wish you would follow me in a somewhat careful survey of this bed."

"All right."

"I want you to notice exactly the manner in which the covers have been torn from it."

"What about it?"

"Well, the general direction, for example. Last night was an exceedingly hot night, wasn't it?"

"Indeed it was."

"How many covers did you have over you during the night, captain?"

"None at all, if anybody should ask you."

"I doubt if many people used more than a sheet, don't you?"

"I certainly do."

"This room does not strike me as one which would be extraordinarily cool at night; does it you?"

"No."

"And yet the condition of the clothing for this bed would suggest that the woman who occupied it required a blanket and a counterpane in addition to a sheet."

"Sure as you live, Nick."

"And now I return to my original remark concerning the bed covers. Do you notice that each one of those three articles has been drawn in a different direction?"

"Yes, I do, now that you call my attention to it."

"I wish you would remember the fact, for future reference; will you?"

"Certainly. You bet!"

"Now take a look at that pillow, jammed in the frame of the bed."

"Yes."

"There is certainly enough blood upon it to suggest that the head which used it was battered rather hard, isn't there?"

"I should say there was."

"And the pillow is jammed firmly in between two of those brass rods, eh?"

"It looks so, certainly."

"I pulled upon it a little a moment ago, and I know it is."

"Well, Nick? What of it?"

"Do you notice the space between those brass rods?"

"Yes."

"It is a very narrow one."

"Quite so."

"It would require a very small head to force a pillow into the position of that one; don't you think so?"

"I certainly do."

"I don't think, captain, that that pillow could have gotten into the position where we find it, unless it was forced there by hands."

"What——"

"I wish you would make a mental note of that matter as well as the other."

"I will."

"Now, one other thing—the mattress."

"Yes."

"Isn't it rather a remarkable circumstance that in forcing it from its place, as has been done, it should also have been forced toward the foot of the bed?"

"I don't see why."

"Well, every other indication of the struggle—the pillow, for instance, and this bolster, and the condition of the covers—indicate that the trend of the combat, if there was one, was toward the head of the bed, and not toward the foot of it. Haven't you noticed that?"

"I do now."

"Of course. But that is not true concerning the mattress. While everything else about the bed has been shoved and pushed with all strength toward the head of the bed, the mattress alone, which is as much out of place as anything else, has tended toward the foot."

"I'd like to know what you are making of all this, Nick."

"I'll tell you later; after I have had time to digest all the story I have read here this morning, for you must remember I have not told you a hundredth part of what I have seen."

"Oh, I know that, all right. You didn't stand all that time in the middle of the room for nothing."

"No; I did not."

The detective turned away from the vicinity of the bed then and approached the dresser at the opposite side of the room.

He stood for some moments looking down upon the knife which rested where it had fallen, behind the pin cushion.

After a little he took his magnifying glass from his pocket and bent over the weapon—for such it might now be called—but he was careful not to touch the knife.

Presently he returned the glass to his pocket and straightened up again.

"What now, Nick?" asked the captain.

"Nothing of importance yet."

He opened the drawers of the dresser one by one and examined the contents of each, with critical eyes and deft touches, but without materially disturbing anything; and then he passed to a chiffonier and performed the same service for that article of furniture.

"Looking for something you can't find?" asked the captain, with a laugh.

"No; I am searching for something that I am finding," was the quick reply. "I'll tell you that story I promised, some day, and it will be an interesting one, too."

"I hope so. In fact, I think there is no doubt of it. With this sort of a start off, it certainly ought to hold the interest."

"Captain, I think I am through in this room."

"Good! What next?"

"The bathroom, if you please. But first, before we go out, will you look here on the right-hand corner of the mantel? There is something here which I discovered while I was taking my observations from the center of the room. What do you make that out to be, captain?"

"Why, it looks like a particle of ash from the end of a cigar."

"Certainly. That is precisely what it is. Now, I haven't looked inside that vase near the clock, but there should be more ashes there, and possibly the stub of a cigar. Yes; I was right. Both are here, and the end of the stub is still somewhat moist. That was a cool sort of a murderer, eh?"

"Well, I should say so!"

"Now we will go to the bathroom. I'll tell you what else I saw here later."

The detective passed only a very few moments inside the bathroom.

There was nothing there which interested him, save what has already been described; but, nevertheless, when he came out, his face wore an unmistakable smile.

"Find anything, Nick?" asked the captain.

"Same thing," replied Nick, laconically.

"The same thing you were searching for in the bureau drawers?"

"Precisely."

"Well, what shall we do next?"

"I think I would like to visit the dining room and the butler's pantry."

"What in the world do you want to do there?"

"Oh, just look around me. I have a sort of fancy that we will find a tray with two glasses upon it, somewhere there, and possibly a half-empty bottle of port."

"Would you mind telling me what makes you think that?"

"Not at all. The mantel in the front room upstairs"—they were descending the stairs by this time—"is of marble. Now, at some time during the past night, some person has stood at one end of that mantel, a man, presumably, for he rested his elbow upon it—with a glass of port in his hand."

"I'd like to know how in the dev——"

"There is a distinct trace on the marble of the bottom of the glass he held in his hand, showing that while he stood there, and after he had drunk some of the wine, he put the glass down at least once. Now there is no bottle and there are no such glasses anywhere about that room; ergo, they were carried from it."

"I see."

"I merely wish to satisfy myself that there were two persons drinking together on the best of terms, in that room, not long before the supposed murder was committed."

"Why do you say 'supposed' murder?"

"Because we have no proof yet that there has been a murder."

"Great Jehosephat, Nick! isn't all that blood proof enough?"

"Circumstantially, yes. As a matter of fact, no."

"I don't know what more you want."

"I want considerably more, captain, one way or the other."

"Well, here is the dining room."

"So it is; and there, on the table is the tray, the bottle and the two glasses. Do you see them?"

"Perfectly."

"There is also the remains of a light luncheon. Now, I wonder, captain, if the murderer, after he committed the crime, entertained one of his friends to wine and luncheon at the scene of his exploit, eh?"

"There might have been two murderers, Nick. It looks to me as if there might have been a whole dozen."

"Yes; if one were to judge by the quantity of blood that was spilled."

"Nick, what do you suppose was done with the body?"

"That is what I am endeavoring to find out."

"Do you suppose it was cut up and carried away in a sack?"

"Such things have been done, captain. Bodies have been packed in trunks, too, and deposited in attics and other places. However, I do not think you will find one about the house here."

"You think the body was carried away?"

"Yes; I do most certainly think that the body was carried away—or that it walked away."

"Walked away? What in thunder are you driving at?"

"You asked me that question once before, this morning, captain, and I will reply again that I am getting ready to tell you one of the most interesting stories of your career. I wouldn't exchange this case for any that I have had in a long time. I'll assure you of that."

"What is the next move, Nick?"

"The next move is for you to go to the front door, for I hear the people from the central office talking in the upper hall. If you don't mind, I'll step out of the basement door. You can lock it after me. Sometime during the day I'll step around to the station house to see you."

CHAPTER IV.

ZAIDA DE FOREST, ACTRESS.

When Nick Carter arrived at his house he went directly to his study, and having seated himself in his favorite chair, and attitude, proceeded to put together, piece by piece, the rather chaotic accumulation of facts which he had picked up and stowed away in his mind while he was inside the house in Madison Avenue.

He did not accomplish this feat as most men would

have done; that is, he made use of neither pen nor pencil; he made no notes. He merely concentrated his mind on the case, and returned in spirit, if you will, to the house and the room he had investigated so thoroughly.

He remained thus for an hour, almost without moving, and if you had been watching him you might have been pardoned for thinking him asleep, so silent and motionless did he sit, with closed eyes and clasped hands.

But at the end of the hour he opened his eyes suddenly and started to his feet.

"That's the case," he said, aloud, although he was utterly alone. "I'll stake my reputation upon it; and it looks to me very much like the work of 'The Unaccountable Crook.'"

What more he might have said in the nature of soliloquy will not be known, for at that moment his telephone bell rang and he seized the receiver.

"Hello!" he said. "Yes, this is Carter. All right, captain; go ahead."

The information which the captain had to impart was that when he returned to the station house from the house in Madison Avenue he found that the maid who had fled from Devlin and Conlin was there awaiting him.

"I wish, Nick," he added, "that you would come around here and talk with her. I can't make much out of her story, but I suppose you will get at the gist of it in a minute. Will you come? That is, can you come at once?"

"Certainly; I will be there in twenty minutes."

And he was.

He was shown directly to the captain's private room, where he found the maid.

She bore every evidence of intense mental suffering, and had been weeping almost continuously since her shocking discovery in the early morning.

"Her name is Nora Maloney," said the captain, in an explanatory aside to Nick. "She says that she ran away from Conlin and Deylin before she knew what she was doing. She was so frightened that she felt that she must get away, and finding herself alone, she started."

"I can well believe it, Nora," said Nick, kindly, turning to her. "I felt assured that you would return voluntarily as soon as you had time to think it over, for I was positive that you knew nothing about the affair until you entered that room and discovered its condition."

"Thank you, sir," she replied, timidly.

"And now, will you tell me all about it?" continued the detective.

"Indeed, sir, I know nothing about it at all. I got out of my bed at the usual hour, and at six o'clock I went in to call my mistress. You know what I found there, sir," she said, with a shudder.

"What? I know what you found there. Tell me, was your mistress in the habit of rising at six in the morning?"

"Always, sir, in the summer season. She rose at that

hour, took a light breakfast, and then went to the stable in Fifty-eighth Street, where her horse is kept."

"Did she ride or drive?"

"She rode, sir, always. She was very fond of it. She usually returned about eight, or half-past, and at eleven I always gave her a hearty breakfast."

"Have you been living there alone together, you and your mistress?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Nora, you have not yet told me her name."

"Her name? I thought everybody knew that. It was Zaida de Forest."

The captain half started from his chair, and even Nick Carter looked surprised, for during the preceding season the name of Zaida de Forest had been on every tongue as a peerless young actress of ravishing beauty and extraordinary talent.

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Nick, "that she kept no servant but you?"

"None, sir. I could fill all her wants, and we understood each other so thoroughly—or, rather, I understood her wants so thoroughly—that she preferred to have only me."

"And for how long a time have you been serving her, Nora?"

"Since—well, sir, since five years ago."

"You were about to say something else, Nora and you changed your reply, did you not?"

"Yes, sir; but it was unimportant. I merely started to say that I had served her since she first went on the stage; since her début."

"Where was that?"

"In Madrid, in Spain."

"Is she Spanish?"

"Her mother was Spanish. Her father—"

"Well, what of her father?"

"I do not know, sir."

"I am afraid, Nora, that you are not telling the exact truth right there."

"I know nothing about her father, sir, save what she has told me from time to time, and all of which she has directed me not to repeat. I beg, therefore, that you will not question me on that point, for I shall refuse to answer."

This was said so quietly, and with such conviction, that Nick realized at once that the girl would stand by what she said, and he decided, for the present at least, to put that one point aside. However, before he could frame another question, she added:

"I will say this much, sir: I know that she lived in terror of her father, for some reason which she never revealed to me; and that is all I will say about it."

"Very good. I will not press the point. We will return to the events of last evening."

"I fear, sir, that I cannot give you much information on that point, either."

"Why not?"

"Because I was away from home the entire evening. I did not return till late."

"What time did you return?"

"It was after eleven o'clock."

"Was your mistress alone when you got home?"

"Yes, sir. Quite so."

"Do you know if she had entertained any company during the evening?"

"I think she had, sir."

"Have you any idea who it was she entertained?"

"No, sir."

"But even an idea about it?"

"No, sir."

"Do you think that she sent you away for the evening in order that she might receive a guest without interruption?"

"It is possible."

"Do you think it is true?"

"Yes, sir; I do."

"In fact, you know that such is the case, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Has the same circumstance happened before? Of course, I mean."

"Yes, several times."

"At regular intervals?"

"I could hardly say that; but about once a month, I should say."

"Now, I have never heard anything against the character of your mistress. I have always understood that it was irreproachable. Do you also so understand it?"

"There never was a purer, sweeter, or better woman in all the world than Zaida de Forest, Mr. Carter."

"I believe you, for I see that your reply is sincere; and you should know, if anybody."

"Yes, sir, I do know," she replied, with emphasis.

"You say you returned to the house some time after eleven last night?"

"Yes."

"Did you go to your mistress' room at that time?"

"I did."

"How was she occupied when you went to her?"

"She was reading."

"Was she dressed, or had she retired?"

"She was fully dressed."

"Did you see any evidences about the room to suggest to you that she had entertained company in that particular apartment?"

"I did not."

"Did you not smell tobacco smoke?"

"No, sir."

"Was your mistress in the habit of keeping late hours with her reading?"

"Not at all. It was a rare occurrence. You know I have told you how early in the morning she was in the habit of going for her ride, and because of that she almost invariably retired early."

"And yet, when you returned to her, at or near midnight last night, she was reading and was fully dressed, you say?"

"She was."

"Do you think it possible that she could have been expecting another caller at that late hour?"

"I did not think so at the time; I do think so now, as I remember the circumstance."

"Tell me what she said to you when you entered the room?"

"Nothing unusual, sir. Nothing out of the ordinary. She greeted me as she always did—with affection."

"Did she not tell you that she was hungry and suggest that you bring her some wine—some port wine, in fact—and a few wafers?"

Nora's eyes opened in wide amazement, and then she replied:

"She did; yes."

"And did she not suggest that you bring two glasses so that you might enjoy a glass of the wine with her?"

"Yes, sir; but that was not unusual. She frequently did that."

"Nevertheless, you brought the wine, the two glasses and a plate of wafers to the room, did you not?"

"Certainly."

"And did you each drink a glass of the wine?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me where you were both seated while you were drinking the wine."

"Miss de Forest was at the table in the center of the room and I occupied one of the chairs near the window."

"Did either of you go near the mantel, or did either of you put a glass on the mantel while you were in the room?"

"No, sir."

"Do you regard yourself as a careful housekeeper, Nora?"

"Yes, sir. I take pride in it, too."

"You are in the habit, then, of dusting, or wiping off the top of the mantel every day, are you not?"

"Most certainly."

"And you did not neglect that duty yesterday?"

"Certainly not."

"Can you tell me about what time you did it yesterday?"

"While she was out for her ride in the morning."

"Now, Nora, how long a time did you remain with your mistress, when you were drinking the wine last night?"

"Not more than fifteen minutes, I think."

"And after that you retired?"

"At once, sir."

"Did you return the wine and the glasses to their places, or did you leave them there in the room with your mistress?"

"I left them there, sir."

"At her request?"

"Yes, sir. She said that she might want another bite before she retired, as she expected to read for some time, and that I might as well leave them."

"Thank you, Nora. That is a good point. And now we will see if we can find another one."

CHAPTER V.

THE TALE OF A WINEGLASS.

The detective was silent for a few moments, while he went over again in his mind the incidents and the scene in the room in the house in Madison Avenue, as he had viewed it that morning while he stood in the middle of the room, studying the surroundings.

"Nora," he said, presently, "were you disturbed by any noise or unusual sound during the night?"

"I was not."

"You slept soundly until morning?"

"I did, sir."

"Are you a heavy sleeper?"

"Not particularly."

"Your room is located directly over that of your mistress. Is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Isn't you think that if there had been a violent struggle there, with the noise which accompanies such an incident, you would have heard it?"

"I believe that I would; yes."

"If, for example, your mistress had screamed, don't you think it would have awakened you?"

"I am sure that it would."

"By the way, Nora, I forgot to ask you one thing in reference to those wineglasses. When Miss de Forest requested you to leave them there, did you leave them just as they were, or did you cleanse them before you went to bed?"

"I took them into the bathroom and washed them out, sir, certainly. It was port wine, you know, and if a glass stands for a time after having contained port wine, it becomes sticky and unpleasant to handle, to say nothing of the fact that both my mistress and myself are extremely particular about such things."

"Yes, I understand. Now, was it of your own volition that you cleansed the glasses, or did Miss de Forest suggest it?"

"I think she suggested it at the time she asked me to leave the wine there; but I should have done it anyhow."

"If so, now we will return to where we left off."

"Yes, sir."

"You are positive, are you, that you were not disturbed at all during the night?"

"I am."

"Do you know that sometimes we are disturbed in our sleep without having any recollection of it in the morning, unless something calls it to our minds?"

"I should think that quite possible."

"In cases of that kind, the disturbance passes off in the mind as a dream. Now, do you recall any dreams which came to you last night?"

"No, sir, only——"

"Ah, yes. Only what?"

"I do think, now that you remind me of it, that I did have a sort of nightmare in which I thought I was being chased by two ruffians."

"Is that all that you remember about it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Nora, did your mistress frequently have gentlemen callers?"

"Not at all. We lived entirely secluded. In fact, that was one reason why Miss de Forest kept no servant but me. She rarely went out at all, and always wore a veil when she did so. Save for her early morning rides in the park, she rarely left the house, and I am positive that her friends were led to believe that she was abroad."

"Now, can you tell me why she maintained this secrecy of living?"

"I think it was a whim more than anything else."

"You have already admitted that you think she sent you away from the house on several occasions in order that she might receive some person there without your knowledge."

"No, sir; that was not the reason."

"Very well, what was the reason?"

"I am sure that the explanation of that lies with the person who called."

"Ah! you mean that he—if it were a man—insisted that you be sent away out of the house before he made his appearance because he did not wish to be seen by you?"

"Yes. Exactly that."

"Humph! You have made a very good suggestion there, Nora. Now I have a question to ask which I wish you to answer exactly as you think. Do you have any idea that the person whom your mistress expected during the time you were out might have been her father?"

"I have thought that, sir. I will admit it."

"Very good; but whoever it was, he was gone before you returned."

"Yes."

"Nora, I have positive proof, so far as my own perceptions are concerned, that Miss de Forest either expected that caller to return after you had retired, or that she expected some other person. That was why she asked you to leave the wine and the two glasses. That was why she requested you to cleanse the glasses. That was why she

was dressed when you returned. And, Nora, that person was a man. He smoked in the room while he was there with your mistress. He dropped the ashes of his cigar in the little rose-leaf vase which stands on the mantel near the clock, and ultimately he dropped the stub of his cigar into the same receptacle. He also dropped a flake or two of the ashes on the mantel itself, and he put his wineglass on the mantel also, so that it left a stain where it had rested."

Nora remained silent, waiting.

"You have stated positively—and I believe you—that your mistress was—shall we say it?—a woman of irreproachable character, and—"

"I would stake my life upon it, sir; and if she were not I would know it."

"And if you knew it, would you also tell me, now?"

"I would, sir, under the circumstances."

"Very well, then, that brings me to the question I was about to ask. Do you know of, or imagine, any male acquaintance your mistress had whom she would consent to receive in her house—nay, in her own room—between the hours of midnight and daylight? Delve deep into your memory now, before you reply to that question."

"No, sir, I do not; unless, as you suggested just now, it might have been her father. It is possible that he came only in the evening, while I was out, and that their business, whatever it was, was not concluded. He may have felt the necessity of returning, or it may be that he did so at her request, and that the hour was selected because he knew I would be sleeping. That is the only explanation I can suggest."

"And it is by no means a bad one. Do you recall any occasion when Miss de Forest has requested you to bring wine and luncheon in her room after your retired?"

"No, sir."

"Do you believe that your mistress is dead?"

"Yes, sir, yes," and Nora burst into tears.

"Do you believe that she was murdered in her bed?"

"What else can I believe, after what I saw?"

"Then do you not think that it is your duty to her to tell me all you know concerning her, in order that you may assist me in discovering the murderer?"

"Have I not done so?"

"No; you have not done so."

"But, sir—"

"You stated at the beginning of our talk that your mistress stood in terror of her father. Tell me why."

"I do not know why. If I did know, I would tell you."

"Then you are not telling me the truth."

"But, sir, I promised her faithfully—"

"Do you think that such a promise holds in the face of the fact that you believe she has been foully murdered, after having told me all you knew you might assist me very materially in clearing up this mystery?"

"I do not know how to answer you, sir."

"Tell me exactly why Miss de Forest lived in terror of her father."

Nora dropped her eyes and wrung her hands together. She was silent for a long time, but the detective waited patiently, knowing that it was not well to interrupt the current of her thoughts.

At last she raised her head again.

"I think, Mr. Carter," she said, "that her request for me never to tell what she said was more a matter of pride and sentiment with her than anything else. I do not see that I will do wrong if I tell you. It is a very simple thing, after all."

"So I have supposed from the start. And so you have wisely decided to tell me why she feared her father?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Her father is mad, sir—crazy. That is the whole story in one sentence."

The captain stirred in his chair and his lips parted as if he were about to speak, but a quick glance from the detective kept him silent.

"Tell me more about it," said Nick, quietly.

"Miss de Forest's mother died when Zaida was sixteen. That was six years ago, one year before I went to live with her. She was very confiding at that time, and she told me all things with perfect freedom. Among the things she told me was this terror of her father. Her mother had constantly warned her against him. The mother had been obliged to leave him and to live in concealment lest he should find her, for she feared that he would kill her, and when she died she impressed the same fear upon her daughter."

"Zaida has always known that somewhere he was searching for her, and that some day he would surely find her."

"Yes, sir."

"And so she took the surest method of assisting him in his search by going on the stage, where all eyes could see her."

"But you must remember, sir, that he had not seen her since she was a little child, and that Zaida de Forest is not really her name. It is a stage name. She thought the stage the surest way of avoiding him, because she had an independent fortune of her own and did not need to work."

"I see it all, Nick," explained the captain, leaping to his feet. "The murder was the work of a madman, and that madman was the girl's own father. Great Heaven!"

"Wait, captain, wait," said Nick, quietly. "Do not jump at conclusions."

CHAPTER VI.

MURDER OR—

"Nora," said Nick, after a short silence, "do you think you have sufficiently recovered from the shock you endured this morning to have the courage to accompany me to the house where you lived with your mistress?"

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, "must I go there again?"

"If you wish to assist me, yes; and I think you do."

"I do, sir; I do."

"Then are you willing to go there with me now?"

"Yes; if you insist upon it."

"I think I must do so."

"Very well," she said, rising, but becoming perceptibly paler than before.

"Shall I go with you?" asked the captain.

The detective turned squarely around so that he faced the captain, and gave him a meaning glance; then he said, slowly and deliberately:

"I do not think it at all necessary, captain. However, if you wish—"

"No, no," said the captain, who had caught the meaning of that glance, "I have a thousand things to attend to here," and then, as Nora strolled over to the window out of the immediate reach of their voices, he added, in a low tone:

"I see that you wish to be alone with her there."

"Yes," replied Nick; "and I shall take the liberty of sending your officers, who are on guard, out of hearing, while I am continuing this examination there."

"That is all right, Nick. Consider yourself as master of circumstances."

"Thank you. And, by the way, I have not had an opportunity to ask you what opinion the men from the central office had to offer of the affair."

"I didn't discover that they had any at all, save the one we all have, that a terrible crime has been committed," replied the captain, with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

"There is one point," said Nick, "upon which we have not touched as yet, and about which you have not thought of mentioning me."

"What is that?" asked the captain.

"Why, the murderer—if there was a murder committed, I should have thought it necessary, after creating such a frightful scene of carnage, to take the trouble to remove the body?"

"If I have not asked it, it is not because I did not think about it," said the captain. "Now, however, I consider the question is answered."

"Indeed! How so?"

"By the statement of Nora, there, that this is undoubtedly the work of a madman."

"But I have not said that I indorse such a supposition," said the detective.

"Look here, Nick," said the captain, seriously, "every-

time you refer to the murder you qualify whatever you are about to say by remarking, 'If there was a murder,' or something very much like it. Am I to understand that you don't believe—or, no, I will put it in another way—am I to understand that you have any doubt that there was a murder in that house sometime before daylight this morning?"

"My dear captain, if you are speaking technically I will be obliged to admit to you that I have very grave doubts about it."

"Then what in the dev—"

"Wait, captain. Will you be contented for the present, if I make a very simple statement to you about my idea of the case, and consent to wait a while for an explanation?"

"I suppose I will have to be."

"Very well, then I will give you a little problem to chew on."

"That is what I need—something to chew on. I think I could enjoy nails, just at present."

"Then I will say this: I think that a human being was killed in that room in that house sometime between midnight last night and daylight this morning, but I think it was a man and not a woman who met with that fatality. I am equally satisfied in my own mind that Zaida de Forest is alive and doubtless perfectly well at this moment."

"Great Caesar! Nick, do you suppose that she is the murderer?"

"No, I don't. You promised not to ask questions, and I want you to stick to the agreement until I am ready to talk."

"All right, old fellow. I'll do it. But it comes hard."

"And I don't want you to impart to another living soul what I have just said to you."

"You may rely upon that, Nick."

"If you had studied that room as I studied it, and from the same standpoint and—pardon me—with the same amount of experience in that particular kind of study, you would have seen exactly what I saw, and you would have arrived at precisely the same conclusion." /

"You are beyond me, Nick. I'll have to give you up. Shall you return here after you are through with Nora?"

"I hardly think so. But I will keep in touch with you."

"What will you do with Nora? I doubt if she has any place to go now."

"I will place her for the present under the care of my housekeeper."

"A good idea, for then she will be where we can get our hands on her at any moment if we happen to want her."

The detective and Nora left the station house then and walked through to Madison Avenue and to the house where so much had occurred in so short a time.

As they ascended the front steps Nick said to her:

"Wait here a moment. Nora, for I have something to tell you before we enter the house."

"Yes, sir."

"And I wish you to understand that in saying what I am about to say I am departing from one of my most rigid rules; that is to say, I am about to take you into my confidence to a certain extent concerning this case."

"Thank you, sir."

"You must understand, of course, that I have a very excellent reason for doing so, else I would not do it."

"Yes, sir."

"Then, first, let me assure you that I honestly believe your mistress, Miss Zaida de Forest, has not been injured at all, or, if she has, certainly not seriously."

Nora staggered back against the stone balustrade.

"Do you mean," she gasped, hardly able to believe the evidence of her senses, "that Zaida is alive?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"Then—oh, my God!—do you mean that she has killed somebody else?"

"No; I do not mean that. I think there were two men in the house last night, and that one of them killed the other, and I doubt very much if it could exactly be called murder, either."

"You mystify me, sir, more and more."

"It mystified me in the beginning, Nora. It does yet. There is always the possibility that I am wrong, but of this much I am positive, and that is that your mistress is alive."

"Oh! Mr. Carter, you make me hope in spite of myself."

"I want you to hope, for it is through your assistance that I hope to arrive at the real solution of this great mystery."

"How can I help you? Tell me how I can help you?"

"By being brave, perfectly frank and truthful, and by using your wits and exercising your power of memory in whatever direction I choose to ask. It may be—it probably is the case—that your mistress is in grave trouble at this moment; perhaps imminent danger. We must extricate her, or, at least, satisfy ourselves that she is in no need of assistance. Is it not so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, from this time forward, let there be no mental reservation on your part when I question you. If I touch upon subjects which seem sacred to you, put that thought aside and reply to me frankly."

"I will do so, Mr. Carter, I promise you."

"That is right. With that assurance, I think we may enter now. Be brave, Nora, for I am going to take you directly to—that man."

CHAPTER VII.

A FLATTENED BULLET.

The detective rang the bell then, and it was Pat Conlin who opened the door.

"Why, Pat," he said, "I thought you were off duty."

"So I am, sir, but I came back here a while ago, and Fritz Sproedel, who was on duty here, got a message from home that his wife was sick, so I took his place, and let him go."

"How many are here with you?"

"Only one, sir; Carmichael. He's taking a nap in the back parlor. He was on duty all last night, poor fellow, and there's no need of two being on the watch all the time."

"But so were you on duty all night."

"Oh, I'm tough. I don't mind it."

"Tough and good-hearted; eh, Pat?"

"I hope so, sir. A man with a bad heart ain't fit to live, to my way of thinking. I think, Mr. Carter, that the old saying about God's helping those who help themselves could be improved upon."

"Indeed? How would you alter it, Pat?"

"I'd make it read, 'God helps those who help others.'"

"I'm not sure but that you are right," was the detective's comment as he led the way up the stairs, Nora following close in his wake; but she paused for an instant as she was passing Conlin, and said in a low tone:

"I am sorry that I gave you trouble this morning."

"Arrah, don't mention it, *naíovurneen*," exclaimed Conlin. "Sure you were that scared and nervous that you couldn't help yourself at all. Faith, both Devlin and myself have forgotten it, long since."

"Thank you," she said, simply, and followed Nick up the stairs.

The front room had been darkened since Nick was there. The curtains were lowered and the shades were drawn, and Nick, instead of opening them, lighted every gas jet in the room.

"This will answer our purposes just as well," he said, "and it will avoid attracting attention from the outside."

"Why have you thought it necessary to bring me here at all, Mr. Carter?" asked Nora, with a perceptible shudder, for the glare of the gaslights revealed all the hideousness of the room.

"You will know, presently. I have told you already that I wish your assistance, and you are now in a position to assist me materially."

"Tell me what to do, and I will do it."

"Do you recall exactly the condition of this room when you sat here with your mistress a little before midnight last night, and drank a glass of port with her?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Very good. Now, stand here, if you please."

He placed her gently in the position he had assumed.

when he had first entered the room that morning with the captain—that is, with her back toward the windows.

"Now, Nora," he said, "without altering your attitude, I wish you carefully to study every article in the room that is within your range of vision as you now stand, and I want you to make a mental note of anything you see—nothing is too trivial—which is not precisely as it was when you were here last night. If you discover anything, tell me about it at once. If there is any change in anything since that time, tell me about it."

Nora studied that part of the room for a long time, but at last she shook her head and sighed, as if from the effort of mental strain.

"I see nothing of importance that is changed," she said at last. "That Morris chair is much nearer the hall door than it was, and the closet door is slightly ajar. Otherwise it is the same, so far as I am able to determine."

"Very good," said Nick. "You are doing splendidly. I moved the chair myself, when I was here this morning, and the captain is responsible for the closet door. But it demonstrates that you are worthy to assist me, Nora."

"I sincerely hope I will be able to do so, sir."

"Now, I will ask you to stand in this position, if you please," and Nick turned her gently so that she stood facing the mantel.

"Now, if you will perform the same service in this direction," he said, "perhaps you will discover more."

"The rose-leaf vase has been moved," she said, almost instantly.

"Where was it when you saw it last?" asked Nick.

"Much nearer the end of the mantel."

"How near to the end?"

"Shall I point out the spot where it stood?"

"No; measure the distance from the end of the mantel on the back of your hand."

Nora obeyed, and measured off the equivalent of four and a half inches.

"Thank you," said Nick. "Now, what else?"

"The clock itself has been moved a little, sir; and it has stopped."

"Yes; at half-past three this morning, then. I wondered if it were going when you saw it last."

"Indeed it was."

"Now, how far has the clock been moved?"

"Not so much as half an inch, sir, but, all the same, I know that it has been moved since I saw it."

"Why are you so positive?"

"I will tell you. Do you notice the figure in the wall paper behind it?"

"Yes."

"Ever since we have been in this house, that clock has been in the point of the spear in the hand of the figure. But it pointed exactly at the middle of the five black spots in the center of the figure. Now, it does

not do so; it points a little to one side of it—in fact, at the spot furthest to the right."

"Is there anything more about the clock, Nora?"

"Yes, sir!" she exclaimed, excitedly, and would have started forward if Nick had not restrained her.

"Go on, Nora," he said. "You were about to add—"

"That the little glass door where the pendulum swings is not now tightly closed, and my mistress was always particular to keep it so. It has been opened, and—"

She paused again, and Nick smiled broadly.

"Shall I complete the sentence for you, Nora?" he asked.

She turned her eyes for an instant upon him, and he added:

"You were about to express the fear that the little treasure which your mistress was in the habit of hiding in the clock has perhaps disappeared. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did she keep there, Nora? Her diamonds?"

"Yes. She always placed them there. She regarded it as the safest repository for them."

"But she was careful never to disturb the clock when she placed them there, or took them away, was she not?"

"Certainly. Her touch was as delicate as a feather."

"Exactly. So we are to conclude that a rougher hand than hers has tampered with the clock, are we not?"

"Absolutely so, sir."

"Were there many jewels which she was accustomed to place there, Nora?"

"A necklace, a neck chain which was studded with diamonds, several rings, two brooches, and a pair of pendent earrings which once belonged to her mother."

"They were not put in there loosely, of course?"

"Certainly not. She kept them in a chamoise skin pouch."

"Is this one of the pendants you refer to, Nora?" asked Nick, taking a diamond ear drop from his pocket and extending it toward her.

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Then again we are to conclude that another hand than hers opened the little glass door of the clock and removed the contents, are we not? You see, if she had done so, she would have been content to remove the chamoise skin pouch without opening it to examine its contents, but the fact that this was dropped from the collection proves that it was opened."

"Yes, sir; yes."

"I conjectured all this when I was here this morning, Nora, but I needed your expert testimony in order to substantiate it. Now, is there anything else about the mantel which attracts your attention?"

"I see cigar ashes over there on the corner; but you have already told me about that."

"Anything else?"

"No, sir, I—"

"Use your eyes, girl. There is one thing more which you ought to see unless I am entirely mistaken in my surmises."

She studied for a long time with wrinkled brow and was on the point of giving it up, when she cried out:

"Why, yes! How strange that I did not notice it before."

"What is it, Nora?"

"There is a scratch on the smooth surface of this side of the clock which was not there yesterday, and right behind it on the wall, it looks as if—as if—the paper were torn a little, or indented."

"Now let your eyes drop to the mantel itself, Nora, and tell me what you see there."

"Something that shines in this gaslight. I do not know what it is."

"It was not there yesterday, was it?"

"No, sir, it was not."

"Well, Nora, that something that shines on the mantel is a flattened lead bullet. It was fired from a point somewhere over there near the bed. It struck the clock a glancing blow and moved it, as you say, about half an inch, probably. From there it glanced to the wall, striking the latter squarely. The wall, just there, is of brick, for there is a chimney behind that mantel. The bullet could not penetrate the brick and so it fell, flattened, to the mantel, where it now rests."

"But that is not all, Nora. Since I have taken you thus deeply into my confidence, I may as well continue."

"The shock of the bullet against the clock, probably threw open the little door where the pendulum swings and made it possible for anyone who was looking that way to see the chamois skin pouch inside—that is, if the pouch were kept on the left-hand side of the clock as we face it."

"It was, sir. It was. How wonderfully you read things."

"It is wonderful to read print, Nora, in the eyes of a man who does not know how to do so."

"Yes, sir, so it is."

"I think we may leave that part of the room now, Nora."

"Yes, sir."

"I will ask you to face this way, now—to face the bed, if you will. It is not pleasant, I know, but you have recovered your courage now, and you are interested in what we are doing, are you not?"

"Indeed I am."

"It all leads to a sequel which we will get at by and by. Will you turn around? So. Thank you."

He waited a moment, for he feared that she would faint, she grew so white. But she recovered herself, and presently he said:

"Of course that is not the only hole in that part of the room, which is as it was when you saw it last, but there are

two or three things I wish to ask you about, and I will call your attention to them."

"Very well, sir."

"You will notice that the bed has been moved somewhat out from the wall at this end."

"Yes."

"I want you to tell me if the head of the bed is approximately at the same distance from the wall as it has always stood."

"Yes, sir, I think it is."

"Now, irrespective of the bed and the covers, do you notice anything in that alcove that should not be there?"

"Yes, sir, I do," she replied at once. "That sofa pillow on the floor, in the corner, under the chair belongs downstairs, in the parlor. It was never in this room. I can't imagine how it got where it is."

"I can," said Nick. "Nora, you have done me a great service, for you have proved to me that my theory of this crime is the correct one, and it is the most complicated one of my hypotheses."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHO WAS THE OTHER MAN?

It was half-past ten o'clock that evening when the detective again entered the station house of the precinct in which the crime was committed, and walked directly to the captain's room, which he entered, closing the door after him.

The captain was there, and alone, and Nick seated himself at the opposite side of the big desk.

"Captain," he said, "I promised you this morning that I would soon have an interesting story to tell you, didn't I?"

"I think you did."

"And later I mystified you somewhat by remarks I made about the affair."

"You certainly did."

"Well, as I expect to be rather busy about this matter for a while, I thought I would drop in on you to-night and tell the story, while I waited here for the reports of my assistants whom I have sent out to make certain investigations for me."

"That is awfully good of you, Nick."

"I have taken the liberty to direct that my assistants come here to report."

"Sure. That's all right. I am glad you did it."

"Will you give the necessary order outside that if anybody asks for me, he is to be admitted to this room at once?"

The order was quickly given, and then the captain asked:

"What did you do with Nora?"

"Exactly what I said I would. She is at my house in

the care of my housekeeper, and they are getting on together famously."

"Good! And now for the story, Nick."

"In the first place, captain, you must understand that it is a story."

"Of course."

"Built entirely upon theory and what some detectives call deduction, but which I describe merely as using your eyes and your common sense, and afterward putting two and two together."

"All the same, Nick, it is a particular kind of common sense which most of us do not possess."

"That is as it may be. What I wish you to understand is that the story I will tell you is one which I created out of what I saw in that Madison Avenue house when you and I visited it together this morning. Later, I took Nora there merely to ask her a few questions in order to satisfy myself that I had not made a mistake."

"I understand."

"It remains for me now to follow out the line of procedure which I believe is the only solution of this mystery. If the story I shall tell you is not the correct one, I am all at sea and entirely wrong. But, on the other hand, if it is correct, the solution of this strange case is only a matter of hours."

"The story, Nick. The story."

"You must not forget that so far as we are at present concerned, it is pure fiction, based, of course, on fact."

"Yes, I understand. You are merely telling me the story you read in the signs in that room and house this morning."

"Exactly."

The captain leaned back in his chair and put his feet against one corner of the desk, and Nick Carter began.

"Somewhere in the city there is a man whom Zaida de Forest was in the habit of receiving at her house at infrequent intervals. I am led to believe, now, that the man is her father, but whoever he is, it is certain that he is not a lover."

"This man, for reasons of his own which do not appear, was anxious to keep his identity a secret from all others save Zaida de Forest. He even objected to the presence of the maid, Nora, in the house when he visited it, and, therefore, her mistress sent her away when he was expected."

"Yesterday, early in the evening, he went there, the maid having been sent away, as we know."

"Somewhere about half-past ten or eleven, he took his departure, but something had happened, while he was there, which rendered it necessary that he should return. What that something was, I, of course, cannot conjecture, but that it was of sufficient importance to induce Zaida de Forest to wait up for him, and that in the best of spirits and without the thought of fear in her mind, is apparent."

"It is possible that he might have returned within half an hour, or even less. The errand he had to do might not necessarily have occupied but a few moments; but the hour for the return of Nora had arrived, and he did not wish to be seen by her, or to have it known that he had been there at all."

"I see," said the captain. "And for that reason his time for returning was purposely postponed until after she should have retired and was soundly sleeping."

"Exactly. We can imagine that Zaida told him that Nora would be safely in bed and sound asleep by one, or half-past one o'clock, and that she would give her a glass or two of port to make her sleep all the more profoundly."

"That is where the port wine comes in, eh?"

"Partly."

"You are positive, are you, that this visitor was not a lover?"

"I am absolutely certain of it; and I am almost as certain that he was Zaida's father."

"Good! Go on, Nick."

"Nora returned and was sent to the butler's pantry for the wine and wafers. She drank a glass of the wine with her mistress, and, after chatting a few minutes, was told to leave the tray where it was, with its contents, but to wash the glasses."

"Nora then retired, and soothed by the heavy port, was soon sound asleep, and that ends her part of the affair."

"Exactly," commented the captain.

"Then," continued the detective, "about one or half past one o'clock, the man who had been there earlier in the evening returned. We will say that he let himself in with a latchkey which Zaida de Forest had given him to obviate the necessity for ringing the bell; and I will ask you not to forget the point that he possessed a key to the door, for upon that hangs all the remainder of this story."

"All right. I'm all attention."

"He returned, then, about half-past one, we will say, and admitted himself with the use of the key she had given him; and, like all men who use night keys, the moment the doors were open before him, he dropped the key in his pocket, closed the doors, ascended the stairs and—forgot all about the key."

"You mean that he forgot to return it to Zaida, eh?"

"Precisely."

"And she also forgot all about it?"

"Naturally. Women rarely think about such things. She had little or no use for a key at any time, and doubtless kept it in a bureau drawer, or in her purse. The point of the matter is, that the man still had the key in his possession when he went away from the house the second time, which he did not do until about one o'clock in the morning, or very soon after that time."

"How do you fix the time, Nick?"

"I am coming to that presently. Whatever the circumstance was which called him back to the house again at that late hour, and kept him above an hour and a half after he returned, it was of importance to each of them, and it is certain that they discussed it amicably. I want you to understand that there was no quarrel or sign of a quarrel between these two."

"Eh?"

"When the man returned at or near half-past one, he asked if he could smoke. Zaida raised no objection, so he lighted a cigar and crossed over to the mantel in order to drop the burned end of the match into the small rose-leaf vase which stood there.

"They were talking interestingly together, and he remained at the mantel.

"He is a tall man—fully six feet I should say, for he easily rested his elbow on the end of the marble shelf; and in order to do so with comfort, he pushed the little vase along the shelf until it was quite close to the clock, which, of course, stands in the center.

"While he stood there smoking, it was an easy and a natural gesture for him to swing his hand around from time to time, and deposit the ashes from his cigar in the vase, which he did.

"Zaida offered him a glass of wine, which he accepted. He crossed to the table, helped himself to the wine and also a wafer—I don't know if you noticed the few crumbs on the floor at that point or not—and returned to his former attitude, placing the wineglass on the mantel beside him.

"He remained standing there at the mantel all the time he was in the room—that is to say, he did not occupy a chair. Some people can talk and think better on their feet than in any other position. Doubtless he is one of them.

"It is certain that he finished his cigar while he stood there, because he dropped it inside the vase with the ashes, where, as you know, I found it, and discovered also that it was not yet thoroughly dry."

"Yes, I remember."

"During this conversation, Zaida remained seated at the table in the chair she had occupied while Nora was in the room, and if I am any reader of circumstance, I should say, because of these relative positions which do not appear to have been materially altered throughout the interview, that he was engaged in pleading with her to conform to some wish of his, and that she steadily and calmly refused."

"And that very circumstance might have led to a quarrel, Nick?"

"No; it did not. These two did not quarrel. I am positive of that. I think, on the contrary, that they were friendly almost to the expression of affection, for I know

that when he took his departure, she accompanied him to the lower door."

"How in the world do you know that?"

"Because the tray containing the wine and the two glasses with the plate of wafers was transferred from her room to the dining-room table. When she left the room to go to the door with him, she took the tray with her, and in the lower hall I am quite certain that he took it from her and carried it to the dining room."

"One would think that you were there and saw it all."

"Not at all. It is very simple. It is certain that it was found in the dining room. We found it there, you and I."

"Yes."

"If Zaida had taken it downstairs, she would have deposited it in the butler's pantry, and, I think, would have put the wine away where it belonged—but the man simply put the whole outfit down on the table and returned to her. And this demonstrates another point, which is, that, although he had doubtless been in the house before, several times, he was not familiar with it. There were two burned matches on the floor in the basement hall, showing that he lighted his way with them."

"Talk about reading by signs, Nick! Why, the last of the Mohicans wasn't in it with you."

"He didn't have to be."

"Well, what next?"

"The man returned to where she was awaiting him in the hallway on the parlor floor. She then bade him good-night. He went out. She closed the door, forgetting to put up the chain, and returned to her room."

"That leaves her alone in the house, Nick, with nobody there to commit the crime."

"Wait, captain. There was another man in the house all the time."

"Another—man—in—the—house—all—the—time!" exclaimed the captain, aghast.

"Yes; and a man who knows that Zaida de-Forest is rich; that she possesses magnificent diamonds, and that there was booty well worth securing, in her possession, in that house."

"A burglar, Nick?"

"An amateur burglar, I should say. Probably an ex-member of the company in which she played last season. A man whose face was known to her, I should say. One, perhaps, who had sought to make love to her at some time in the past. But those are immaterial points. The important one is that he was there, that he had been there many hours, awaiting his opportunity which was interrupted each time he thought it was at hand. The important part of it is that he was there, and that when she returned to her room, after dismissing her guest, she encountered him—met him face to face, doubtless, as she crossed the threshold."

CHAPTER IX.

WHERE THE BULLET CAME FROM.

The captain sat quite still regarding the detective with a quizzical expression on his strong face. Presently he exclaimed:

"I'm not going to question your deductions or conclusions, Nick. You said that this story you are telling was all a dream, anyhow; but you also said that it was a dream which you expected to come true."

"And I do."

"Well, what I was going to say is this: How in all the blazes that ever burned you can make all this romance out of what we saw there together this morning, is a mystery to me."

"Be patient and I'll explain."

"I'm as patient as an ox. Go ahead."

"The man was there. He had been there I don't know how long—perhaps since that morning, when she went for her ride in the park. That would have been as good a time for him to get inside the house as any. Or, he may have found Nora temporarily off her guard some time during the day, with the door open, and have slipped in then. He may not have found a means of entrance until toward evening."

"I am sure, however, that he was there many hours, and that he spent part of the time behind the big davenport in the parlor, part of it in a closet which opens off from the back parlor, part of it on the couch in the back parlor, and the last part of it in the rear room on the second floor—the room directly behind the one occupied by Zaida herself."

"Would you mind telling me how you are so cocksure of all this?"

"Not at all. The man chewed tobacco all the time. Doubtless he was nervous. Perhaps he did it only to pass the time and because he was not where he could conveniently smoke to while away the time. He spat copiously in all those places, and with utter disregard of the havoc he wrought in doing so. Behind the davenport, in the closet, on the carpet in front of the couch, and in many places in that rear room on the second floor; and there is a much used and much abused quid of tobacco under the bed in the front room."

"The bloody bed?"

"Yes. How it got there I don't pretend to know, and I don't care. The stains in the several locations I have described are sufficient for my purposes."

"Well, let's get back to the story. I'm interested. But, hold on a minute. Tell me this: If that fellow was there as long a time as you say, why the devil didn't he make his attack while Zaida was alone early in the evening, when Nora was out?"

"You must remember," replied Nick, "that she was not alone or only for a very short time. When Nora went

out, the hidden man did not know that she would not return at any moment. It was the safest course, since he had waited so long, to wait a little longer until the house was quiet. And again, it is more than likely that the visitor, whom Zaida was expecting, was not far away, and doubtless he put in an appearance as soon as Nora was well out of the way."

"I see."

"Zaida was not really alone at any part of the time. Her visitor came almost immediately after Nora departed. He remained until it was time for her to return. She came within a few moments after he had gone. She remained with her mistress some little time, drinking the wine. When she did finally go to her room, it was up to the concealed man to wait until she was asleep, and before he had decided to act the visitor of the early part of the evening put in a second appearance."

"Well, now for the rest of the story," said the captain.

"You remember what an insufferably hot night it was last night?"

"You bet I do!"

"Well, bear that in mind, and also that every one of the three windows in Zaida's room was open."

"Yes."

"It was also after three o'clock in the morning. Now, the man who was hidden had been greatly annoyed by all these continued interruptions of his plans."

"I shouldn't be surprised if that were so. I have never been in the burglar business, but it must have affected him somewhat as a broker feels it when the market goes against him."

"When Zaida and her visitor descended the stairs, he doubtless came out of his concealment, and leaned over the railing in the hall to hear the end of their conversation. He had doubtless been interested in it, and wished to hear all there was of it."

"Probably."

"When she closed the door after her guest had gone, we will say that she turned and ran so rapidly up the stairs that the fellow there at the railing had no time to return to his place of concealment in the rear room, and there was nothing for him to do but to make the best of it. He probably forgot that the front windows were open."

"Well?"

"Therefore, inasmuch as he had not time to hide himself away again, he confronted her as she entered the room. He meant to frighten her into silence, if he could."

"I see. He was cornered, after a fashion."

"Exactly."

"And then——" The captain was intensely interested now.

"I have questioned Nora very closely to-day," said Nick, calmly, "and she has told me many apparently trivial things which have been of great benefit to me.

For one thing, she said that Zaida always kept a loaded thirty-two-caliber revolver in the drawer of a stand which stood near the head of her bed. You saw it."

"Yes; but there was no pistol there."

"No. However, it was there then."

"Well?"

"When Zaida found herself face to face with this man, she suddenly dodged him—she got past him and ran to that stand. She seized the pistol and fired it point-blank at him as he pursued her across the room. I think she missed him, but I don't know. If she did not, she must have had time to fire twice. Then she screamed. Now, captain, do you see the point?"

"I'm blown if I do!"

"Why, the guest she had just entertained could not have been two hundred feet from the house by that time."

"By thunder! That's so! And he had the latchkey in his pocket! That's why you asked me to remember that point."

"Timely."

"He heard the shot, or the shots, and the scream, and he right-about-faced in no time."

"Now you're getting at it, captain."

"He remembered that key. He pulled it out as he ran. He was inside the house about as soon as the man upstairs had got past Zaida's guard, and he had thrown her over on the bed in an effort to strangle her."

"To smother her, captain. He had a soft pillow with him which he had brought upstairs from the parlor, and had kept with him for that very purpose—to smother her ere—when he should attack her, if that were necessary. You saw it in the corner under the chair, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And now, as you say, the man outside, having heard the shot and the scream, had returned. He bounded up the stairs and probably entered the room just as this intricate operation was going on."

"And the burglar was so much taken up with what he was doing that he had no idea of the approach of the other."

"Precisely; and now, captain, can you imagine the rest?"

"No; you tell it."

"I have already said that I believe this guest to have been Zaida's father. We have both heard that he had at least the reputation of not being exactly right in his mind. Can't you conceive of the effect that a sight like the one he encountered now would have upon such a man?"

"I know what effect it would have upon me, if I should find one of my daughters attacked in that manner; and I'm not mad, either."

"Well, captain," said Nick Carter, calmly, "that is what all the world goes from."

"From that burglar, or would that be later, or not?"

acquaintance, or would-be lover, or whatever he was? Do you mean that?"

"Yes, I mean that. Some of it might have come from the guest—the man who came to Zaida's rescue. It is more than likely that he was severely wounded in the fight that followed, and the struggle must have been a desperate one; but you can put down your money on the proposition that the thief shed the most of it."

"You mean that he was killed?"

"Killed? Yes. There is no doubt of that in my mind."

"Then, Nick, will you tell me why Zaida de Forest did not send for the police at once, notify them of what had happened, make her affidavit in support of it, and so let the whole thing rest right there? There would have been no difficulty about the matter for her."

"Certainly not, but you forget the guest; the man who killed the other man."

"Well, he—"

"If he was so particular about hiding his face even from Nora, it is not at all likely that he desired it to be seen by the police. Zaida could not have made a satisfactory explanation without him to support it, and he doubtless refused to do that. Then again, I have no doubt that he was severely wounded."

"Well—"

"Well, that brings me back to the object of his double-barreled call at the house last night—always provided, mind you, that the man was Zaida de Forest's father. I believe that he was begging her to return to him under her own name, and that now an accident has rendered it imperative that she do so."

"Well," said the captain, slowly, "that's all right. I don't see any objection to all you say. He might have been her father, and he might have been begging her to go away somewhere with him, and just at this point there was no reason why she should not go; but, will you tell me why they thought it necessary to cart away the body of the dead man, and why they chose to make it appear that Zaida de Forest had been murdered?"

"That is easily answered," replied Nick. "First, the father chose that Zaida de Forest should cease to exist from that moment, and here was the opportunity. He had only to remove the corpse of the dead man, and to rid himself of it; then Zaida could resume her own name, and it would be forever supposed that the actress had been murdered. Second, the pride of the woman would not permit that a dead man should be found in her room after she had died; and third, if he were found there after she had disappeared, she would have been charged with the crime, or, at least, as an accessory; and so—they disposed of the body."

CHAPTER X.

OVER THE BRIDGE.

The two men were interrupted at this moment by the opening of the door, and Nick Carter's youngest assistant, Patsy, entered the room.

"Sit down, Patsy," said Nick. Then he turned to the captain, and added:

"I told you when I arrived that I had sent my assistants out to gather information on certain points, and that I had requested them to report to me here, and I want you to know, before I question Patsy, or any of them, that I have based each one of the inquiries I have directed them to make, entirely on the story I have just related to you."

"All right, Nick."

"If their discoveries do not tally with the scheme I have outlined to you, then I am entirely at fault, and we must begin all over again. Now it stands to reason, does it not, that the parties to this affair could not have gotten away from that house without a conveyance of some sort?"

"Certainly."

"And, according to my theories, they must have left that house at or near four o'clock this morning."

"Yes. About that."

"Now, Patsy, tell the captain what you have done since you left me."

Patsy turned and faced the captain.

"We keep a list at our office, sir," he said, "of all the public conveyances in town, their numbers and the names of the drivers; their stations, the location of their stables, and, in fact, everything about them; and when a new license is granted, or one is changed, the bureau notifies us."

"That is a cracking good idea, Nick!" exclaimed the captain.

"My chief," continued Patsy, unmoved, "examined that list very carefully when he came home this afternoon, and from it he selected twenty-one hacks for me to look up, and I wrote down the numbers and names of the drivers in the order of their importance, according to Mr. Carter's plan."

Patsy paused for a moment, as if to give added emphasis to what he was about to say, and then with studied deliberation, he added:

"He was the fifth one I questioned, sir."

"What?" exclaimed the captain. "Do you mean to say that you have already discovered the hack and the driver that—who— Where the devil is he, young man?"

"At the door, sir, with his back; and there are sufficient blood stains inside of it to insure that he tells the truth about the matter, if we had no other evidence."

The captain smashed the bell on his desk with a vehemence which brought the doorman to him on a run.

"Bring that hack driver in here!" he ordered; and in less than a minute the driver stood before him.

"Will you permit me to do the questioning?" asked Nick, gently.

"Sure, Carter. Go on. This beats all."

"You were called to a certain house in Madison Avenue about four o'clock this morning?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; and I got a hundred dollars for the job provided I wouldn't tell about it; but that don't go when the police ask questions," replied the driver.

"Who engaged you?"

"A young woman. She rode back to the house with me, and we didn't make the bargain until we stopped in front of the house in Madison Avenue. Then she told me that there had been trouble and that two men were badly hurt. She offered me fifty if I'd take the job and consent to hold my tongue, and I accepted."

"I thought you said you got a hundred," interpolated the captain.

"So I did. I'll explain in a moment," was the reply. "You see, she went into the house, and in a minute or two she came out again with a tall man, and between them they carried another chap. The tall man was bandaged around his head and one of his hands, and he walked sort of stiff, as if he was hurt, but I could see at a glance that the other chap was dead."

"Oh, you saw that, did you," roared the captain, "and you didn't drive them straight to this station house? I'll have a talk with you later."

The driver turned a furtive glance toward Nick Carter, and replied:

"I didn't have any call to tell about it now, and I wouldn't have done it if Patsy, here, had not given me Nick Carter's word that it would be the last I would ever hear about it."

"Captain," said Nick, sharply, "if you would like to finish this case without me, you are welcome to do so, but you asked me to take charge of it, and——"

"Enough said, Nick. I won't interrupt again. You're all right, driver. Talk without fear or favor."

"Go on with your story," ordered Nick.

"I saw that the other man was dead at once. They had wrapped him in a blanket, but he must have bled awfully, for the blanket was soaked with it. It's funny that some of the stuff didn't drop on the sidewalk."

"It did," said Nick. "Two drops of it only. Go on with your story."

"When I saw the chap was dead, I balked.

"It's a hundred for this job," says I, 'before you put the stiff in here.'"

"And did you not add," asked Nick, gently, "that it would be another hundred for your silence, at the end of the journey?"

The driver hung his head for an instant, and then nodded.

"I did," he admitted, "and got it, too."

"Well, what more?" asked Nick.

"They put the stiff into the hack, and the girl was climbing in when she called out that she had forgotten her diamonds. The big man went back into the house after them, and she called after him that they were in the clock."

"He wasn't gone but a minute. We drove away at once when he came out. We went across the Brooklyn Bridge, and in the middle of it we stopped long enough for the big fellow to chuck the body over the rail into the river. He picked his time, halfway between two coppers, and he did the act so quickly that I hardly knew about it myself. Then we drove to the Brooklyn end of the bridge, and around to the corner of Fulton and Tillary Streets. There they stopped me. I let 'em both out. They paid me the two hundred, and I left them there, and that's all I know about it."

"I guess that's right," said Nick. "You can go. You can't hear of this again unless you are called upon to testify, which is unlikely, for I think the parties will confess when I find them. Wait; did you hear any conversation between the man and the woman?"

"Not a word more than I have told you."

"You may go."

"Thank you, sir. I always knew that I could take Nick Carter's word for gospel."

"Now, Patsy," said Nick, "skip over to Brooklyn and take the trail. It ought to be easy."

The young assistant was off like a shot; but he had hardly disappeared when the detective's chief assistant, Chick, entered the room.

"Well, Chick," said the detective, "have you completed your job?"

"Yes. There are a lot of things there which will interest you, too."

"The point is: did you discover what I sent you to do?"

"I did. The name is Carrington Ordway, and—here it is with the address;" and he passed a slip of paper to his chief.

"Hello!" exclaimed the detective, as he glanced at it. "This is the very same house, on upper Fifth Avenue, which the Maharajah of Pootjhar occupied while he was here." Then he turned to the captain.

"I sent Chick," he exclaimed, "to Zaida's house to make a thorough examination of all letters and papers there, in the belief that he would discover something which would lead us to her father; so you see, captain, the trail is already narrowing, eh?"

"It is simply wonderful, Nick!" ejaculated the captain.

"Not yet; but quite so. Now, Chick, how do you know that this is the correct name and address?"

"Here are two short notes from the man to Zaida de Forest," replied Chick. "One of them is signed 'Father'

and the other, 'C. R.' On Zaida's writing desk I found this envelope, addressed and stamped; and this beginning of a letter which goes with it. It begins, as you will see, 'Dear Fath—' Something must have interrupted her at that moment."

Nick turned a smiling face upon the captain.

"Did you ever take notice of the fact, captain, that a woman always addresses the envelope before she writes the letter?" he asked. "It is an invariable rule with them."

"Never noticed it," said the captain.

"Ask your wife about it when you get home, then. She will tell you that it is true. And now, Chick, if you will slide up to Carrington Ordway's address, find out who his doctor is, and keep close tabs on the house until I appear, I think that will cover the bill. In the morning you might make up and apply there for a position as valet, or butler, or something. You probably won't get a job, but you'll get an opportunity to talk with one or more of the servants."

Five minutes after Chick had taken his departure Ten-Ichi put in an appearance.

"Now, captain," said Nick, "we will hear something interesting, if I guess correctly."

"Guess correctly! You're the champion guesser of the world, Nick. Holy smoke! We might have been pottering around and about this affair for a month and never got within a league of it, and here you copper the whole thing in a few hours."

"That is because I have studied the method of reading signs, invented by my father, years ago, captain. Now, Ten-Ichi; have you seen Mr. Klaw, or Mr. Erlanger?"

"No; but I saw their manager."

"Well?"

"When he knew that the information was for you he readily went to the office with me, and we were not long in finding the list of names of the company that Zaida de Forest was with last season. I think, too, that we picked out the name you want."

"Tell us about it."

"Well, it seems that the man I talked to was out on the road with that company as manager for a while after they left the city. I told him what you told me to say—that you wanted to find out the name of a member of that company who made love to Miss de Forest, and, although repulsed by her, kept it up. I described him as you said."

"Described him!" ejaculated the captain.

"Certainly," replied Nick, turning toward him. "I told you that the man stretched himself on the couch in the back parlor, didn't I? There was some dust on his back which he left on the couch, and the head of the couch is one of those round rolls, so I was able almost exactly to determine his height. I called it five feet ten inches and a half. The couch is covered in plush, and some of his

back hair stuck to the plush, so I was able to say that he was a blonde. There was an unmistakable mustache hair on the floor beside the couch, and also a fair-sized piece of a finger nail, so I was enabled to say that he wore a short, bristling mustache and had the habit of biting his nails. I was also certain that he was about the city at the present time, and out of a job, or he wouldn't have been on the lay he was; and when you add to that the fact that he chewed tobacco incessantly—which men always notice and disapprove of quite as much as women—you have a fairly good description of the man; don't you think so?"

"Ye-es," admitted the captain.

"Well, Ten-Ichi?" continued Nick, turning to his assistant again.

"Mr. Grewson lighted on the name at once. He said the man could be no other than Morton Marlborough, a talented fellow, but as crooked as a ram's horn, as he expressed it. I will quote what he said."

"If you please."

"Marlborough is a talented chap, but as crooked as a ram's horn. The great trouble with him is that he drinks like a fish, and is entirely irresponsible when he does so. He is out of a job this season because lately he has taken to morphine, and he is going the way they all do when they are up against that game. He persecuted Miss de Forest so that she came to me, and I was obliged to put a stop to it. The day the company disbanded, I happened to be present, although I was not then with the company. I stood quite near when Marlborough approached Miss de Forest, and I heard him say to her: 'Miss de Forest, when next I press my suit, it will be under conditions where you will not care—or dare—to refuse.' I warned her to beware of him, because I knew him to be a bad man when he got started, but I don't believe she gave the matter a second thought.' That is the sum and substance of my information, chief."

"Did you find out Marlborough's address?" asked Nick.

"Yes; in Thirty-third Street."

"And anything about his haunts?"

"Yes; all of them, I think."

"All right, Ten-Ichi. It is up to you now to find out if he is missing. Report to me as soon as you can, at the house."

"Are there any more reports to come in, Nick?" asked the captain, when Ten-Ichi had gone.

"Yes," replied the detective, laughing at the expression on the captain's face. "There is one more."

"Whose may that be?"

"Mine."

"Hough! Are you ready to make it now?"

"Not quite; it should be ready some time to-morrow, however."

"He leads to me as if all you had to do now is to go to the house in Fifth Avenue and slap the charges onto Mr. Carrington Ordway and Miss Zaida de Forest."

"I'm not quite ready to do that," was the reply. And then, with an abrupt change of subject, he asked:

"Captain, did you ever hear of 'The Unaccountable Crook'?"

"Can't say that I ever did, especially. I've heard the expression used as applying to somebody, but I never paid any attention to it. It's a chap, isn't it, who doesn't steal from women, and who goes around doing good acts with everything he doesn't steal?"

"Yes; that's the man."

"Well, what about him?"

"Nothing, only I've got a hunch that this case is bringing me mighty close to him, and I've been rather anxious to see him for a long time."

"The Unaccountable Crook, eh? Well, I'd like to see him, too."

CHAPTER XI.

AROUND NEW YORK.

The first thing which Nick Carter did on the following morning, after disposing of his breakfast, was to seat himself at the telephone and call up Bellevue Hospital. He then asked for one of the young doctor's whom he knew well, and who, he was certain, would be on duty at that hour.

When he had him at the other end of the phone, he said to him:

"Doctor, I wish you would do me the favor to step into the morgue and ascertain if there is a body there which was fished out of the East River some time after five o'clock yesterday morning. The body, if it is the one I am searching for, should be that of a man about thirty years old, a blonde, and there should be severe wounds on his body. I even think that more than likely his throat was cut, for it seems to me that the quantity of blood he lost could be accounted for in no other way. Will you do that as a favor to me?"

"Certainly, Mr. Carter. Glad to serve you."

"Will you call me up when you have the information?"

"Yes."

Nick hung up the phone and waited; and after almost half an hour the bell rang.

"Well?" he asked, placing the receiver at his ear.

"It is there," came the reply. "There is a queer story about it, too."

"What is that?"

"It appears that the body was heaved from the bridge about half-past four yesterday morning. There was a tug-boat passing at the time, and the men on the boat saw the body falling. They succeeded in picking it up, all right."

"Thank you," said Nick. "That is about all I wished to know."

"I say, Mr. Carter."

"Yes?"

"You were right about the wound in the throat; only the throat was not cut, in the sense in which we usually make use of that expression."

"How, then?"

"The man had been stabbed in the throat and the weapon had severed the jugular. He must have lost an awful lot of blood."

"He did, doctor. I am much obliged to you."

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Carter."

Ten minutes later the telephone bell rang again, and this time it was Chick who was at the other end.

"Good-morning, Chick," said the detective, recognizing the voice at once. "What is doing up your way?"

"The name and address I gave you is all right," said Chick.

"I have never doubted for a moment that it was," replied Nick.

"I have found the doctor and I persuaded him to talk. His name is Parsons."

"What does he say?"

"That he was called to attend Mr. Carrington Ordway about seven o'clock yesterday morning. Mr. Ordway was not seriously injured, but he has an ugly slash from a knife across his left cheek, and another wound of the same description in the palm of his left hand. Ordway's explanation was that some roughs had attacked him and his daughter in the street and that he had received the injuries in defending her."

"All right, Chick. That fits in nicely with everything else. I don't want you to take your eyes off that house till I get there—and I can't tell you yet exactly when that will be."

"I'll be there, whenever it is."

"Good!"

The detective wheeled around in his chair and called his man, Joseph.

"Go up to Patsy's room," he said, "and tell him that I am waiting for him."

"No need," said Patsy, at the door, "for I am here."

"Good-morning, Patsy. What time did you get home?"

"About three this morning, sir."

"Accomplish anything over in Brooklyn? It isn't important, now, for we've got the case pulled down tight. All the same, I want your report."

"It was dead easy, that thing," replied Patsy. "The early hour of the morning; the man with the bandaged

face and hand; the beauty of his companion and her deadly pallor; I had no trouble in tracing them."

"Well, tell me about it."

"They were not noticed until they approached the junction of Fulton, Washington and Court Streets. They had to go there to get a conveyance, you know."

Nick nodded.

"A policeman saw them, but it was already getting daylight, and he didn't pay much attention to them; but he did know the driver of the hack they engaged. I found him at his home in Adams Street."

"And he remembered all about them, of course."

"Certainly. He drove them to the Cortlandt Street ferry, ostensibly to catch a train on the Lehigh Valley road. That was all he knew about it; but I skipped over there, for I was pretty sure that the cabs that were on duty there when they were driven there yesterday morning, would also be on duty when I got there."

"I was fortunate enough to find the one I wanted."

"And," said Nick, interrupting Patsy, and smiling, "you discovered, did you not, that the two passengers were taken from Cortlandt Street ferry to a house on Fifth Avenue—a corner house opposite the park?"

"I'd like to know how you knew that, already," he said.

"Chick found it out in another way," said Nick.

"Confound it!" said Patsy. "Chick is always getting ahead of me."

"Tut, tut, lad. He did not get ahead of you at all. You merely arrived at the same result by different methods, that is all. Ah! Here is Ten-Ichi. Well, young man, how about Mr. Morton Marlborough?"

"He's missing, all right," replied Ten-Ichi. "He has not been seen at his boarding place since the day before yesterday in the morning, and the saloons he frequents—well, he was last seen in one of them about noon of that day. He had been drinking heavily, and had asked for credit for everything he took. In doing so, he had boasted that he would have plenty of money in two or three days, perhaps the very next morning."

"That fits in also," was Nick's comment. "Now, Ten-Ichi, I want you to go and find the Mr. Grewson you talked with last night at Klaw & Erlanger's. Tell him that the body of Morton Marlborough is at the morgue and that you wish him to go with you to identify it. As soon as the identification is made telephone me here."

"Is there nothing for me to do?" asked Patsy, as when as Ten-Ichi had gone out.

"Yes, Patsy. You may take a trip to that house on

upper Fifth Avenue and put yourself under Chick's orders. He may have some use for you."

"All right, sir."

"I don't want Carrington Ordway and his daughter to give us the slip now, and I should not be surprised if he is already getting under way to light out."

"You think he'll skip?"

"He's bound to—until this thing blows over—if he can get away."

"I'm off, then."

"I have an idea, Patsy," said Nick. "that this Carrington Ordway is a very slick article, and I am not sure that he is exactly right in his head. If he is the man I think he is, he is as shrewd as they make them, and he may succeed in slipping through your fingers."

"I'll bet a hundred he won't," said Patsy, with decision.

"One thing is certain," continued the detective. "He is a rich man. He has almost unlimited means, and money will perform miracles, at times."

"I know that, sir."

"Then put yourself under Chick's orders, and keep a sharp eye on that house. Don't let those people get away from you."

"I won't, sir, and neither will Chick."

"All right, lad; skip along, now."

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNACCOUNTABLE CROOK.

Nick Carter did not leave his house until the message he expected came over the wire from Ten-Ichi.

It announced, as he was assured it would, that the identification was complete; that Mr. Grewson had at once identified the body at the morgue as having been Morton Marlborough in life; and now, as the chain of evidence was complete, the detective left his home and took his way to the station house, where he found the captain awaiting him.

"Well, Nick," he said, when the detective entered his private room, "have you got that report of yours ready yet?"

"Not quite, captain. I'm going to ask you to help me make it," was the reply.

"How is that?"

"I thought, perhaps, you would like to go with me to the house of Carrington Ordway."

"Why, yes; as I would. I had not thought of it, but I would like to go."

"I think," said Nick, "that it would be as well if you were present. There will doubtless be many things said there which I would like you to hear."

"And I should like to hear them."

"You know, captain, this is no ordinary crime."

"That is certainly true."

"I don't speak in the sense you mean, captain."

"How, then?"

"Why, the point is this: If Ordway had been content to leave things as they were in that front room, after the fight was over, and if he had come directly to you and reported the whole thing just as it was, giving himself up freely for the inquiry, he would have been admitted to bail at once, and I doubt if he would ever have had any trouble about it. You remember, in the beginning, how often I made the remark, 'If there was a murder?'"

"Yes, I do. I see now what you meant."

"As the case stands now, however, Ordway will find it has another color. It is one thing to kill a man in self-defense, or in defense of your daughter, but it is entirely a different matter if after having done so you try to conceal the body, cart it away, in fact, and throw it into the East River as if it were so much carrion."

"Right you are, Nick."

"And there is another view of it also," continued the detective. "Ordway not only did the things I have just cited, but he left it to be supposed that Zaida de Forest had been murdered, and I think the courts will require him to explain why he did that."

"Sure to, Nick."

"If my reading of the story was correct—and we will soon have proof whether it is or not—he was entirely justified in killing Marlborough. That goes without saying; but I think he will find it difficult to justify his succeeding acts. Shall we go now, captain?"

A carriage was called, and the captain and the detective entered it together, and were driven rapidly uptown.

There, however, a surprise awaited them.

When they approached the house Nick was troubled because he saw no sign anywhere of either of his assistants, and he at once leaped at the conclusion that the birds had already flown and that Chick and Patsy were after them.

He knew that if such were the case one of the assistants would have gone immediately to a telephone to notify him, and so, without applying at the residence at all, he left the carriage and hastened to the nearest public telephone he could find and called up his own house.

Joseph answered him, and in reply to his question whether either of the assistants had sent in a message since he left the house, replied:

"Yes, sir. Just thirty minutes ago. I took down the time."

"Well, give me the message."

"I was to tell you that Ordway and his daughter drove away from the house in their private carriage a few minutes before the message came to me; that as he and Chick—it was Patsy who telephoned——"

"Yes, yes; go on."

"And that as he and Chick had no orders to make an arrest, they would follow and report here by telephone as soon as the destination was known."

"Is that all?"

"No; he wished me to tell you that if the pair tried to leave the city before you could catch up with them, that Chick would take the responsibility of making the arrest."

"All right," said Nick. "Now, Joseph."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll give you the number of this phone where I am now, and then I will sit right here until you receive the second message from Patsy or Chick. As soon as you get it call up this number. It won't be long before you will hear something."

"Very good, sir."

Nick explained to the druggist who he was, and that he was awaiting a very important message, and requested that nobody be permitted to make use of that phone until he was through with it, offering to pay for all the time. Then he stepped to the door and told the captain what was detaining him.

The next half hour was about the most uncomfortable and the most useless, according to his own estimation of it, that Nick Carter had ever passed; but at the end of that time the message came. It was:

"Ordway and his daughter have gone on board the steamship *Ruric*, where he has engaged the finest suit of accommodations on the vessel. The ship does not sail till three o'clock this afternoon, so there is ample time for you to get there, and nothing will be done till you arrive."

"The *Ruric*, oh?" remarked the captain, when he was informed of this, and they were driving downtown again.

"She is the biggest and finest vessel of the fleet, isn't she?"

"Yes; and the newest and fastest. This was her maiden trip. Ordway lost no time, did he?"

"Not a bit of it."

The journey to the pier where the vessel was lying was accomplished in quick time, and directing that the carriage wait for them, the detective and the captain went out on the pier.

Chick met them when they were halfway to the gang plank.

"They are here, all right," was his greeting. "At one time I was more than half a mind to arrest them, but, knowing that they could not get away, I thought it best to wait."

"You did, right, Chick. There are particular reasons why the captain and I desire to make this arrest ourselves. Where are they?"

"They have Suit A, on the starboard side—the finest suit on the ship. A parlor, two bedrooms and a bath. It is like a suit of rooms at a first-class hotel, the purser tells me."

"Where is Patsy?"

"Keeping tabs on the room."

"Come, captain," said Nick. "Lead the way, Chick, and show us where this Suit A is located."

When they arrived at the entrance to the suit Nick motioned to his two assistants to stand at one side and wait, and then he stepped forward and tapped lightly on the door.

"Come in," called a voice—the voice of a man from the inside, and the detective opened the door and entered, closely followed by the captain.

It was the parlor of the suit into which the detective and the captain intruded. It was elegantly furnished, too. There was a bookcase filled with books, a sofa, several easy-chairs, a library table lashed to the deck, oil paintings in gilded frames fastened to the bulkheads, and every evidence of comfort and elegance.

Seated at the table, engaged in writing, was the man who had bidden them enter, and across the apartment, in one of the lounging chairs, was Zaida de Forest, pale, careworn, and with the appearance of being almost ready to collapse.

But the scene changed as the two men entered, for the uniform of the captain told only too plainly what their errand was.

The man leaped to his feet with a cry of rage, his face blazing with fury, while his face was almost as white as

the bandage which covered one cheek and passed under his chin.

Zaida also started from her chair; but she tottered as she rose, and would have fallen had she not grasped the back of the chair in which she had been seated and so steadied herself.

"Nick Carter!" cried out the man thus brought to bay. "By heavens! Carter, this is too much!"

"Yes," replied Nick. "And I recognize your voice, Ordway. I told you I would, the next time I heard it. You are——"

He got no further.

The man had been gathering himself for a leap, and now he made it.

With a wild spring he crossed the distance between him and the detective, thus launching himself full upon Nick, and the attack was so sudden and so really unexpected that his fingers were around the detective's throat almost before Nick realized that he was attacked.

"Father, don't!" cried Zaida, in agony. "You will only make it worse for us. Don't, father, please don't!"

But her father did not hear her.

Unprepared as Nick Carter was for the attack, he nevertheless received it as he did everything—coolly.

Ordway's fingers were at his throat and the other arm was around his body, but nevertheless the detective was not thrown, or even badly choked. His assailant was a powerful man, too, but he was no match for Nick Carter.

The detective threw up his left arm as the attack was made upon him, and thus succeeded in getting his forearm under Ordway's chin while he threw his right arm around his assailant's body.

Then began a slowly, even pressure of such gigantic strength that no man could have withstood it, and Ordway's head was gradually forced backward until his clasp on Nick's throat relaxed and the arm he had thrown around the detective's body fell to his side.

He collapsed utterly then, and permitted the detective to force him down again into the chair in which he had been seated when the detective and the captain entered.

"Forgive me, Carter," he murmured, and he fixed his great, glowing and now pathetic eyes on the detective.

At the same moment Zaida staggered forward and fell upon her knees beside her father.

"Forgive him, Mr. Carter," she pleaded, tears streaming down her cheeks, and adding her own appeal to his. "Forgive him for the attack upon you. He will answer for the rest, willingly; I know he will. He has done it all

for me—all for my sake—all because he loves me. Forgive him, Mr. Carter, for my sake. I have suffered so much—so much!"

She buried her face against her father's arm and wept.

"Poor child," said Nick. "I am sorry for you. And I am sorry for you, too, Ordway; more sorry than I can tell you. You complicated matters terribly for yourself when you carried Marlborough's body from the house and threw it from the bridge into the river. If you had only left it there in the house and gone directly to the captain of the precinct——"

"Yes," murmured the man. "I know. But I never do things right. I never did do things right. I am one of those unfortunates who always succeed in giving the wrong impression."

"Tell us all about it," said Nick. "The captain is here to listen."

"Tell him, father," murmured Zaida, without raising her head; but while he told the story she did raise her matchless eyes to Nick Carter's face and study with close attention every possible effect the recital seemed to have upon him.

"I have been separated from my little girl, Carter, ever since she was a child," said Ordway, humbly. "I have sought for her everywhere, all over the world, and it was only four weeks ago that I found her."

"She was afraid of me, Carter. She had been taught to live in terror of me. She had been educated to the idea that I was a madman. She lived in terror of me, and when I went to see her first and told her who I was, I was alarmed at the first effect the knowledge had upon her."

"But I persisted, Carter, and bit by bit I disabused her mind of those terrible ideas until she consented to receive me whenever I should call."

"I besought her to leave the house in Madison Avenue and come with me to my own residence—to resume her right name and live with me, as she should do, as my daughter; but she was loath to do so."

"I went again and again to her with the same prayer on my lips, but always with the same result until the night before last. Then she half agreed. She said if I would give her one more month and would permit her to think it all out alone, and if I would give her all her mother's letters to me, to read over in that time, she might consent."

"I had gone to the house where she lived early in the evening. Zaida had sent her maid away so that I would not be seen. I told her that I would take her mother's

letters to her the following night—last night—but she insisted on having them at once. She said that I could return at one, or half-past one, and she gave me her key so I need not have to ring the bell and thus arouse Nora, perhaps.

"I returned to my home, Carter, and secured the letters, and I was back again at Zaida's house at half-past one.

"She said that Nora had returned and had retired, and that there was no chance that she would be disturbed."

"And then," said Nick, "did you not go and stand by the mantel, while you smoked a cigar and drank a glass of wine?"

"Yes," said Ordway, surprised. "How did you know that?"

"Never mind. Continue."

"I put the letters in Zaida's hands, and then, as you say, I stood with my elbow on the mantel, smoking and sipping at the wine while she looked them over. I asked her to read one of them while I was there, and she ended by reading almost all of them.

"The time flew swiftly, Carter, for I saw nothing and thought of nothing but my daughter. I stood near the mantel the whole time, rarely speaking. Only watching her—and suddenly I discovered that it was after three o'clock. I told her I must go.

"She went down the stairs with me, and I saw that she had brought the tray with her, so I took it from her and carried it to the basement. Then I returned to her and took my departure.

"Zaida followed me out on the doorstep and there she kissed me good-night.

"It was the first time my daughter had kissed me, Carter, and I was wild with joy. I knew that I had won, and that she would return to me.

"When she went inside and closed the door I stood there where I was, beside myself, with joy.

"And then, Carter, while I stood there, I heard a pistol shot from her room, and almost instantly after it I heard her scream. I dashed at the door, but it would not yield, and then I remembered that I still had the key in my pocket.

"I don't know how I got upstairs, but when I did get there I found that ruffian whom you call Marlborough struggling with Zaida. He had thrown her on the bed and he was smothering her cries with a sofa pillow.

"I struck him and seized him. He was a powerful man and we fought desperately, there on top of the bed.

"Somehow, Zaida got free from us. She staggered

across the room and fell fainting into one of the chairs while I still struggled with the ruffian.

"Suddenly I discovered that he had a knife in his hand. He slashed me across the cheek with it and then I seized it. In doing so I cut my hand badly, but I tore it away from him and struck him with it.

"I struck him in the throat and the blood spouted over everything; but, nevertheless, he still struggled mightily and I was giving out. Then I struck him again—in the breast, I think—and he ceased to struggle. He was dead.

"I looked around me. Zaida was still unconscious, but I got some water and roused her.

"When she knew what had happened she was horrified.

"Ah! Carter, what more is there to tell? I persuaded her against her will to do my way, which was to dispose of the body and leave it to appear that she had been murdered in her bed. I went into the bathroom and washed the blood off me as best I could. Then she bound up my two wounds, and then, while I wrapped the body of Marlborough in a blanket, she had the courage to go for a hack. You know the rest, do you not?"

"Yes," said Nick, "I know the rest. You need say no more."

"Zaida got some blood on one of her shoes, and I persuaded her to change them. Then, when we were leaving, I returned for her diamonds. I opened the bag to see if they were there, and lost one of them—one of her mother's ear drops. Then we drove to the bridge and I threw the body into the river. That is the whole story and the whole truth, so help me God!"

"I know it is," replied Nick.

"And Carter, may I whisper to you?"

Nick bent forward, and Ordway continued:

"You know me for 'The Unaccountable Crook,' do you not?"

"Yes," said Nick.

"But you also know that I never was a crook, do you not?"

"Yes," said Nick. "I think it was a hobby of yours to do good acts in that way and under that name."

"I am not sorry for it, Carter. I have saved more than one poor girl, when I have been playing at being a crook, or a hack driver, or something of that kind. Carter, I did you a service once, will you help me all you consistently can in this affair—for Zaida?"

"Yes, Ordway, I will," replied the detective.

It only remains to be said that although Ordway was indicted and tried for manslaughter the jury acquitted him without leaving their seats.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 444, will contain "The Crime of Union Square; or, Nick Carter's Ten Deductions."

YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS WEEKLY

- 21—Ted Strong's Steadiness; or, The Cattle Rustlers of Ceriso.
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- 23—Ted Strong's Indian Trap; or, Matching Craft with Craft.
- 24—Ted Strong's Signal; or, Racing with Death.
- 25—Ted Strong's Stamp Mill; or, The Woman in Black.
- 26—Ted Strong's Recruit; or, A Hidden Foe.
- 27—Ted Strong's Discovery; or, The Rival Miners.
- 28—Ted Strong's Chase; or, The Young Rough Riders on the Trail.
- 29—Ted Strong's Enemy; or, An Uninvited Guest.
- 30—Ted Strong's Triumph; or, The End of the Contest.
- 31—Ted Strong in Nebraska; or, The Trail to Fremont.
- 32—Ted Strong in Kansas City; or, The Last of the Herd.
- 33—The Rough Riders in Missouri; or, In the Hands of His Enemy.
- 34—The Young Rough Riders in St. Louis; or, The League of the Camorra.
- 35—The Young Rough Riders in Indiana; or, The Vengeance of the Camorra.
- 36—The Young Rough Riders in Chicago; or, Bud Morgan's Day Off.
- 37—The Young Rough Riders in Kansas; or, The Trail of the Outlaw.
- 38—The Young Rough Riders in the Rockies; or, Fighting in Mid Air.
- 39—The Young Rough Rider's Foray; or, The Mad Horse of Raven Hill.
- 40—The Young Rough Rider's Fight to the Death; or, The Mad Hermit of Bear's Hole.
- 41—The Young Rough Rider's Indian Trail; or, Okanaga, the Cheyenne.
- 42—The Young Rough Rider's Double; or, Unmasking a Sham.
- 43—The Young Rough Rider's Vendetta; or, The House of the Sorceress.
- 44—Ted Strong in Old Mexico; or, The Haunted Hacienda.
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- 48—The Young Rough Rider's Girl Guide; or, The Maid of the Mountains.
- 49—The Young Rough Rider's Handicap; or, Fighting the Mormon Kidnapers.
- 50—The Young Rough Rider's Daring Climb; or, The Treasure of Copper Crag.
- 51—The Young Rough Rider's Bitter Foe; or, The Challenge of Capt. Nemo.
- 52—The Young Rough Rider's Great Play; or, The Mad Ally of a Villain.
- 53—The Young Rough Rider Trapped; or, A Villain's Desperate Play.
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- 56—The Young Rough Rider's Close Call; or, Life Against Life.
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- 63—Ted Strong's Treasure Hunt; or, The Demons of Cuthwaite.
- 64—Ted Strong's Terrible Task; or, Joining a Secret Clan.
- 65—The Young Rough Riders in Shakerag Canyon; or, Routing the Rustlers of the Big Horn.
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